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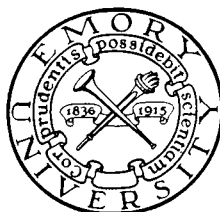
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LONDON: CHAPMAN & HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

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BY

GERALDINE E. JEWSBURY,

AUTHOR OF

"MARIAN WITHERS," "HALF-SISTERS," ETC.

"Point de Faiblesse."—DANTON.

NEW EDITION.

LONDON:

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

1865.

TO
THOMAS CARLYLE,
THIS BOOK IS RESPECTFULLY

Inscribed

BY
THE AUTHOR.

CONSTANCE HERBERT.

CHAPTER I.

NEAR the old village of Ingatstone, in Essex, at the end of a lane that separates it from the high road, there is still standing a many-gabled mansion of dark red brick, built in a courtyard, the entrance to which is through a grey stone archway, surmounted by a clock and bell. The gates have long since been removed, moss and grass grow out of the joints of the weather-stained stones, and the clock is incapable of telling the hours, having lost both its hands.

This old house stands in a lonely place, and was formerly surrounded by a moat. It is still of some extent, and was originally built in the shape of a cross, but a good deal of it has been pulled down, and the materials employed to build the large stables, barns, cart-sheds, and shippens, which have converted the courtyard into a farmyard. The moat has been filled up, except one portion of it, which serves for a horse-pond.

The house fronts the gateway, and is only separated from the farmyard by a small grass plot, surrounded by a wooden paling. The hall door stands in a deep recessed porch, with a heavy stone bench on each hand. The door, studded all over with large iron nails, and with its massive handle, looks as if it had belonged to a church. An air of gloom and desolateness hangs over the place, seen from this view, even on the brightest summer day; it looks to the north, and, consequently, catches little sun. There is a strange, ghost-like look about it, as if it were standing in a dream, and ought to have been a ruin long ago.

The CHAUNTRY, as the place is called, was formerly an old church manor, and, as long ago as the reign of King Stephen, was the country-house of the Nuns of Barking. In the large garden, that lies on the south side of the house, there is a broad sunny walk, sheltered by an esplanade of fruit-trees, which is still called "The Nun's Walk."

The Chantry lands were bestowed by Henry the Eighth upon a family named Herbert, de Herbert it was then, for they owned estates in other parts of England, and were a powerful family; but the broad lands were diminished in the troublesome times of the Parliamentary wars, and more recently in the cause of the Stuarts; and early in the reign of George the Third the de Herberts had settled down on the remnant that remained—a peaceful race of country squires, without the chivalrous de,—cultivating their own land, the private carriage and coach-and-four in which they formerly used to travel to the parish church being given up, and their ordinary style of living differing but little from that of the better class of farmers, although they still retained their standing amongst the gentry of the country, and Squire Herbert, as he was called, was noted for keeping the finest breed of horses in that part of the country. Also, the Chantry lands contained a small borough, one of the anomalies since swallowed up in "Schedule A"; and this borough, of which the owner of the "Chantry" disposed at his pleasure, gave the estate an importance

which it could scarcely have derived from its extent, though it was a handsome, compact estate, and lay all within a ring fence. The Squire Herbert when our tale begins, which was somewhere about the year 1793, was a square, thick-set man, of past fifty, with iron-grey hair, a hard, weather-beaten face, and a pair of light, gleaming, grey eyes, which gave a somewhat malicious expression to his face.

He was not upon habits of intimacy with any of the neighbouring gentry; the lower class of farmers and labourers always spoke low when they named him—he was regarded by them as being under an evil destiny.

It is an intensely Catholic district about the Chauntry, and it was believed by the country people that the family of the Herberts had begun to decline ever since they accepted the spoils of the church, and that for several generations one of the family had either gone insane, or had been afflicted with some incurable disease, or had died a violent death. They looked upon the family as *curst for sacrilege*, and a dark tradition of some outrage committed by Hugh de Herbert against the helpless nuns at their dispersion, one of whom, who had been bedridden for ten years, was found dead in a ditch by the roadside, was considered as the great sin which had brought the vengeance of Heaven upon them, which would pursue them until they were rooted up from the face of the earth.

So far as Ralph Herbert, the present squire, was concerned, the evil destiny lay heavily upon him. His wife, a lovely young woman, had died of consumption within five years of their marriage, and of their three children, the eldest was an IDIOT.

This was certainly some reason for the reserve upon which he stood with his neighbours, and why he did not feel disposed to extend to them the somewhat riotous hospitality which was the fashion of the day.

The second son, for all three of his children were boys, was a rollicking, jovial young fellow, addicted to hard drinking, a keen sportsman, and a vulgar Don Juan so far as opportunity allowed.

The youngest, Charles, was of a different nature—a student, full of a refined and passionate sensibility, with a large, rich, but somewhat inert nature, which craved strong emotions and excitement, falling between-whiles into intense fits of melancholy, which came upon him even in boyhood, holding him for days together as under a black pall.

At Cambridge he distinguished himself, and returned home in the hope of being allowed to study for the Bar, but owing to some pecuniary difficulty, a debt of his brother's, he had to remain at home idle for twelve months after leaving college.

Love, in idleness, is almost inevitable. A respectable yeoman, living on a farm next to the Chauntry lands, had a daughter, a refined, superior young woman. The young student fell in love with her; she was captivated, in her turn, by one so handsome and superior to everyone else she saw. At first her father had hospitably invited him, and evinced a rough hearty liking for him; but the moment he suspected the state of matters with his daughter, he drew back, sent the girl from home, and strove, like many another man, to undo the past.

The young man, desperately in love, was not to be thus baffled. Believing that it was from pride alone that the father of his beloved strove to be beforehand with the objections that might be raised to receiving the daughter of a small farmer into a family so much above her, he resolved to appeal to his father. Except for the diversion to his thoughts caused by this his first and passionate attachment, his position at home would long since have become intolerable.

It was a bright summer evening: Ralph Herbert had been all day in the hay fields after his men, and had come home hot and tired. He entered the little flagged parlour, which was the family sitting-room, and throwing himself into his easy chair, he called for a jug of ale, and commenced slowly to fill his pipe.

Out of doors the evening was bright and warm, but in the parlour it was chill and dusk, and needed the wood fire which was burning on the hearth. The ceiling was

low and rafted, a moderately tall man might have touched it with ease : the walls were panelled and painted white, and sundry hats, coats, and whips hung round ; a low wide casement took up one side of the room, but the small lozenges of dim discoloured glass admitted little light at the best of times, whilst that little was made less by the thick wall and heavy stone framework in which they were set. A large dining-table and some heavy high-backed chairs formed all the furniture. A handsome pointer lay at its master's feet, whilst in a corner of the window-seat sat the poor idiot, busily cutting pegs of wood, or rather making shavings of a heap of firewood which lay beside him.

Ralph Herbert's face had a bitter, gloomy expression as he watched his eldest son through the curling clouds of smoke. It is only mothers who love their afflicted children the best. His meditations, which did not appear pleasant ones, were broken by the entrance of Charles, who, hot with his walk, and irritated with his thoughts of all the grievances which he had, as he conceived, against his father and the world in general, was evidently in no pleasant mood. The old man glanced at him, but took no notice, and continued to smoke ; the young man kicked down his brother's pile of wood, and seated himself opposite his father.

"What is the matter with thee, lad ? thou seemest put out about something."

"I want to speak to you, father ; I have something to say."

"Out with it, then ; but help thyself first to a glass of ale, and then let us hear what it is."

The old man refilled his pipe, and seemed prepared to await his son's leisure.

The young man had a great deal to say, but in these kind of conversations the beginning is not so easy when there is nothing to lead the way ; at last, after a few moments' silence, he said, abruptly,—

"Father, is it your pleasure that I am to live here all my life idle ? Did you send me to college only that I might hang about here till I am ready to drown myself

for shame and weariness? Because Hugh is a spendthrift, and Ned, there, an idiot, is that a reason why I am not to have a fair start in life to make my own way? First it is a heavy gambling debt for Hugh, and I must wait till the next half year's rents fall due; then it is some drain in the fallow field, which must be done at once. Are my prospects in life, my chance of making something of myself, of less worth than a fool's folly, or the improvement of a field? What have I brains for? what have I learning for, if I am to stay here till I grow as senseless as the beasts you fatten, or the ground that feeds them? I will enlist for a soldier if it is to endure a week longer."

"And yet for such an impatient hero as you state yourself, you have hitherto seemed well content," said the old man, calmly.

"It is to-night that my degradation has been brought home to me," replied the young man, bitterly.

"Aye, indeed; and how may that have been?"

"I love Kate Hatherton; her father has sent her away; he told me just now he would have no idle young men coming about his house. He thinks of me as he does of Hugh, or may be worse; for Hugh has the estate to hope for: but I have nothing—I am nothing."

"And what is Kate Hatherton to you, young man? or what can she ever be? An honest man's daughter, and leave her so."

"I wish Kate Hatherton to be my wife; but how can I ask her, when one of her father's ploughmen would be a better match than I, a poor gentleman and a scholar?"

"This is all young men's talk," said his father, sternly; "I wish to have no more of it. Kate Hatherton is no wife for you: her father knows it, and will refuse his consent as I do. What are you? a boy of not yet twenty; and you come to me—to me, your father, and rate me for your bringing up, and prate of a wife of your own choosing. You forget yourself strangely, young man, in using this tone with me."

Luckily, at this juncture, the old domestic, Cicely, came in to lay the cloth for supper, and no more conversation was possible that evening.

The next day Squire Herbert rode over Stephen Hatherton's farm, ostensibly about some clover. The farmer was down in the fields, and the squire rode after him. When their business was done, the squire endeavoured to get the farmer into talk ; but he was cold and distant—almost surly.

"What is this my son tells me about your daughter?" said the squire at last, dashing into the midst of things.

"How should I know? My daughter is a good girl, and I have sent her away to keep her so."

"Quite right—quite right," rejoined the other, with vexation ; "because it is as well to be plain with you. I could never give my consent to that match, and the lad has nothing."

"Hark ye, squire," said the farmer, laying his hand on the mane of the other's horse, "plain speaking is, as you say, the best ; and I tell you, that if my daughter were to marry your son, she would do so under my curse ; and may God deal with her as an undutiful child if she goes against me in this matter. No child of mine shall marry into a house that has brought the anger of Heaven down upon it—for what? that is best known to yourself. But I ask you, has there ever been a generation since you came to the Chauntry lands, that there has not been either a cripple, or a natural, or one afflicted with a sore disease, amongst the children? Has there ever been an old man amongst you? or has the eldest son ever succeeded to his father? I am not a learned man, and don't pretend to know the reason of these things ; but I read it as a warning not to give my daughter to your son. I don't want to hurt you, I have no ill-will against the lad : he did not make himself. But now you know my mind, and good day to you."

The farmer strode away, perhaps not liking to seem to watch the effect of what he had said.

The squire sat for some minutes like one who has been stunned by a heavy blow. What the farmer had said echoed only his own black thoughts, when his fits of depression were upon him.

He did not say anything to his son about his visit ;

but a few weeks after the conversation in the stone-parlour, he sought for him, and, handing him a letter, said, "Sir Simon Letheby writes to say, that a good appointment at Bombay is in his gift, if any of my sons can avail themselves of it. There is an election coming on ;—but that is nothing to the purpose. Does it please you ?"

Of course the young man could only express the great satisfaction he felt at such a prospect.

"Well then, my lad, start to-night—you will catch the mail at Epping ; Sam shall ride with you and bring back the mare. God bless thee, lad, and make a good man of thee !—And, Charles," continued he, after a pause, and with something that choked him in his voice, "if I never see your face again in the world—and most likely I never shall—marry anybody you please, so that she be a good woman ; and make much of her, and I give you my blessing."

The old man grasped his son's hand, and, turning hastily away, began to give directions to the farm servants in a blustering manner, which, however, did not prevent one of the labourers saying to his companion, that "the old master looked as if he were sorry above a bit, and like to cry."

The bustle and unexpectedness of his departure prevented anything like the indulgence of sentiment on the part of Charles ; he would have been more sorry if there had been more time for it.

He left his father's house that night, and a fortnight afterwards he sailed for India.

His career there has nothing to do with the present history. He was clever, and had every prospect of rising in the service.

The very first letter he received from his father contained the intelligence that Kate Hatherton returned home shortly after his departure, and that she was engaged to be married ! It was supposed to be a very fine match for her in a worldly point of view, the intended husband being a rich lawyer retired from business ; but he was older than her father, with a

grown-up son ; he had, too, the reputation of having made his money by practices which had once nearly caused him to be struck off the rolls ; he had a violent temper, and the son was many degrees worse than the father, and having succeeded to the business, was keeping up the family reputation for unscrupulous practices, and for getting rich at all hazards. The next letter announced that the marriage had actually taken place, and that Kate Hatherton and her husband had gone to live in London ; her father had left the farm and gone away, some said to America, but no one knew for a certainty what had become of him.

From the bitter comments made by old Ralph Herbert upon Kate's heartlessness and mercenary marriage, anyone would have thought that his whole heart had been set upon obtaining her for his own daughter-in-law.

Charles Herbert suffered keenly at this destruction of his hopes ; but he knew Kate better than his father did, and his faith in her was not shaken even by the fact of her marriage with another man, and his affection for her continued as strong as ever. It lay deep in the very foundations of his heart ; he knew as well as if he had been told, or had been present to witness all the desperation to which she had been previously driven, and since she had done it ; he felt assured that there had been no other course left, humanly speaking, possible to her ; his instinctive trust in her was stronger than any action that could be brought in evidence, and he did not for an instant think a hard thought of her.

It must, however, be confessed, that he found great satisfaction in the thought that she had married an infirm, tyrannical, and disagreeable old man. True, this would render her lot the more intolerable ; but although he believed he was capable of laying down his life for her, he would not have raised his finger to make her life happier with the husband she had been induced to take ! Indeed, if she had chosen a better sort of man he would have resented it as a deadly injury.

He believed sincerely enough that his own heart was henceforth closed to all sentiment of love,—and as to

marriage, he meditated with a feeling of proud revenge that his whole life should prove his constancy and leave an ineffaceable remorse in the soul of her who *had been* Kate Hatherton! Besides, as he was at a remote station in the Bombay Presidency, where no European female was to be found within some hundreds of miles, his constancy was not severely tested.

His official career in India was brought to a very unexpected close. Within three years he received intelligence of the death of his father and of his idiot brother. A few months later there came a letter from the family solicitor informing him that the gambling spendthrift, his second brother, had broken his neck in a steeplechase before he had had time to do more than make a fair start upon the road to ruin. Charles was now the possessor of the Chauntry lands, and giving up all idea of becoming a Nabob, he prepared at once to return to England, and to take up his position as a country gentleman.

CHAPTER II.

THE vessel in which Charles Herbert sailed from India touched at Madeira. Amongst the passengers who came on board there, was a lady in deep mourning—she appeared to be about three-and-twenty—a tall and elegant figure, and a complexion too dazzling for perfect health; her features were not regular, but a profusion of light golden hair, and a pair of lovely blue eyes, made her look like an angel to all the idle gentlemen passengers, who had assembled on deck to watch the new arrivals come on board. The lady, who was accompanied by a female attendant, went immediately to her berth, where she remained for several days.

During this time the general curiosity to know who she was, had succeeded in discovering that her name was Wilmot, that she was the daughter of a retired merchant who had been ordered to Madeira for his health; he was recently dead, and his daughter was now on her return to England, where she was to reside with an uncle. She was an only child, and by her father's will inherited a large fortune free from all control.

This was a high'y pleasing report, and such of the gentlemen as were unmarried prepared to profit by the chance which had thrown so desirable a prize within their reach.

Charles Herbert heard the intelligence and the speculations concerning the fair Miss Wilmot with profound

indifference. Kate Hatherton was still mistress of his heart, and as he had succeeded to the family estate he felt a certain contempt for a fortune made by trade.

When Miss Wilmot appeared again amongst the passengers, the young men vied with each other to obtain her good graces. Charles Herbert kept aloof, and with the natural instinct of female perverseness, he was the only man she took pains to attract.

Vanity affords a practicable breach in the heart of all men; they have such an intense pleasure in being, as they conceive, appreciated by women, that the most egregious flattery from a woman seems nothing more than a tribute of common justice, and they accept it with a certain candid affability that is wonderful. Charles Herbert was not (for a man) remarkably vain; he imagined that his heart was steeled against all fresh impressions, but he was not insensible to the discernment shown by Miss Wilmot in his favour.

He thought her a very superior, agreeable young woman. He certainly did not make love to her, but he professed a great friendship for her. In the course of the voyage, which was much prolonged by calms and contrary winds, he confided to her the history of his attachment to Kate Hatherton, of his disappointment, and of her marriage. Perhaps unconsciously, he told it in a manner which, far from extinguishing Miss Wilmot's interest in him, only inspired her with an ardent desire to console him, and to compensate him in some measure for his past sufferings. Partly deceiving herself, partly misled by his manner, she was far from surmising that this first attachment was still deeply rooted in his heart as ever.

The voyage at last came to an end; the passengers separated to their various destinations, but not before Miss Wilmot had refused to make the happiness of no less than four individuals, who all declared, in language the most ardent, that all their hopes of earthly felicity depended upon marrying her.

Charles Herbert and Miss Wilmot parted at Southampton. She proceeded to the residence of her uncle in

London, in the firm belief that he would follow up the acquaintance. He went down to the Chauntry with his thoughts full of the property to which he had succeeded, and thinking very little of Miss Wilmot after he had made his last bow to her.

For some time after his arrival at the Chauntry he was fully occupied ; for his brother, before breaking his neck, had contrived to complicate his affairs, and leave as much business in arrears as could be contrived during the brief period he was the head of the family.

After a while Charles Herbert began to find the Chauntry dreadfully dull. He missed the cheerful companionship of Miss Wilmot more than he would have believed possible. Of Kate he could learn no tidings, beyond the fact that she was married, and living somewhere near London, in great affluence. In spite of the dulness of the Chauntry, however, Charles Herbert found it very pleasant to be a landed proprietor. He certainly grumbled sufficiently at the harassing affairs to which he was a victim. They did bore him a little, no doubt ; and the farming interest in which he was now mixed up, and the *Mark Lane Express*, seemed very complicated, and altogether foreign to his previous habits, but still there was a certain amount of very genuine satisfaction in being in the position to have these things to grumble at. When, however, he went up to town to consult his lawyer upon a mortgage which his brother had raised upon one part of the estate, his annoyance was more genuine. In possessing the estate at all he had more than he could have expected, as the youngest brother ; but he resented the mortgage quite as bitterly as if he had been the born heir, and began to lay schemes for raising the value of the property.

Whilst in town he felt himself obliged to go out to Blackheath, to pay his respects to Miss Wilmot. He had no serious intentions in the visit. As he drew near the house, a staring ostentatious mansion, he began to think himself a fool for coming, and to entertain some modest misgivings whether Miss Wilmot might be as glad to see him as he had taken for granted.

A footman in a stylish livery opened the door, said that Miss Wilmot was at home, and conducted him through much splendid upholstery to a handsome newly fitted-up library, where he left him standing, surrounded by shelves loaded with books in the full glory of all that roan, and russia, and calf, and gilding could do for them, with tables and chairs of the newest inventions for convenient reading and writing.

Miss Wilmot did not keep him waiting. She was evidently glad to see him again. She had begun to fear he would never come. She introduced him to her uncle, a retired London merchant, who prided himself on having everything about him the very best of its kind; who would not have had a nail out of its place, or a door or a window that was not finished with the greatest exactness. Although he never read, he would not have had a book in his house unless it were bound and gilt in the solidest manner, no matter what the contents.

The uncle, albeit a formal elderly gentleman, who considered that unmarried young men were not to be let into a house where there were "young females," as he called them, could not avoid inviting Charles to dinner.

Charles Herbert repeated his visit again and again. He did not fall in love with Miss Wilmot; but he liked her very well. He saw that she was attached to him. He thought her a most eligible match, and, finally, he did what almost any other young man would have done in his place; he made her an offer of marriage in due form, which she accepted.

Heaven help the world, if a great sufficiency of domestic comfort did not result from unions far less auspicious than this!

Miss Wilmot herself was intensely happy. She was engaged to the only man she had ever cared for, and her strong affection for him occupied her too much to allow her to perceive any deficiency on his part.

To be allowed to love with all the heart, unchecked and unrepelled, suffices a woman for a long time.

As to Charles Herbert himself, ever since this marriage had been decided upon, he had felt strangely indifferent.

He had set the ball rolling, and he could not rouse himself to consider where it would stop. He was not unhappy ; he did not even in his thoughts revert to the past, he was simply indifferent to all that was going on, as though it concerned some other person. Sometimes this strange tranquillity surprised him, but that was only a passing reflection, like a dream within a dream.

At length the preparations for the marriage were almost complete ; the settlements were nearly finished. The Chauntry house had been let to a farmer, as it would have cost more ready money than was desirable to make it a cheerful residence for a young bride. A small pleasant house had been taken at Fulham, with a garden sloping to the water's edge. In all these arrangements, Miss Wilmot's uncle had followed his own ideas of what was right and fitting ; Miss Wilmot did not interfere, Charles acquiesced in all that was proposed, and did all he was advised—which, as it chanced, was the wisest thing he could have done.

It needed only three weeks to the ceremony. Miss Wilmot and an aunt who was to take her place in her uncle's establishment, were going up to town for a morning's shopping. Charles, whose gallantry had not been remarkable, volunteered to accompany them ; his proposal was gladly accepted by Miss Wilmot. Their chief errand was to the establishment of Madame Rosine, in Old Bond Street. Charles was appealed to on many points of taste as regarded feathers and ribbons, and other dainty devices of feminine extravagance, until his passive indifference became genuine weariness. At length the ladies retired to another part of the establishment to have some dresses fitted on, and Charles was left in the lower shop to wait their return. He was glad of the respite, and sat awaiting their reappearance in patient abstraction.

Two ladies, who had entered the shop unperceived by him, approached to inspect some article near him ; one of them spoke—he turned hastily at the sound of her voice—their eyes met—it was Kate Hatherton ! She sprang forward, " Oh, Charles, have I found you again ! "

All the years that had passed since they had been separated, the events that had occurred, all seemed to fall like a slough from the recollection of Charles ; she stood there before him who was the life of his life ! There was no thought of treachery, there was no time for consciousness ; it was the instinct by which a man gasps for breath when he has been well nigh stifled.

"Kate ! my Kate !" — they grasped each other's hand, and it was as though they had never parted.

The shop of a fashionable milliner is not the most appropriate place for the first meeting of restored lovers. The lady who was Kate's companion had a nervous dread of being in any way remarkable ; she saw at a glance the meaning of what was passing, and her anxiety was to extricate herself handsomely before any other eyes were upon them. She addressed Charles in a tone of measured politeness, and said :—

"Mrs. Maryland is on a visit with me ; any friend of hers will be welcome. You have not introduced us, Kate, so I must announce myself." She presented her card, and added, "come and dine with us this evening ; my husband will be charmed to make your acquaintance ; we are going to the theatre, and we shall be glad of your company."

Kate did not speak a word, but she looked up into his face with her lips apart, as though life depended on his answer.

"Yes, I will come," said Charles.

"Come then, Kate, dear ; I must hurry you away, we shall be late for our appointment."

As Charles accompanied them to their carriage, the lady said several polite things to him, and he went through the form of replying to them, but he did not hear a word ; he was thinking of the name by which her companion had spoken of Kate. As he handed her in, he said abruptly :

"Will he whose name you bear be there to-night ?"

A deep blush mounted up to Kate's forehead ; but she looked up and said :—

"He has been long dead. I am free, or I would not have spoken to you."

The footman closed the door, Charles raised his hat, and the carriage drove off.

Charles was sitting in the same place where he had been left when he was rejoined by Miss Wilmot and her aunt, at the end of about half-an-hour, and apparently in the same dreamy abstraction.

"Oh, you good, patient Charles!" cried Miss Wilmot; "what unconscionable loitering mortals we must have seemed to you; but we really had a great deal of business to transact, and as Madame was not at liberty, we had to wait. I wish so much that we had arranged to call for you at the library, instead of detaining you here amongst fine fashions."

Charles uttered a few quiet words, in reply; but he was startled to think what a trifling accident would have changed the face of his destiny and hers for ever.

Miss Wilmot detected no change in her affianced husband. She was in excellent spirits, and talked and laughed more than usual.

They went to several other places; Charles obediently accompanied them. What he thought and what he felt, he scarcely knew himself, nor could he have told what course he intended to take in consequence of the event of the morning. He had indeed no intention at all, except to go and see Kate that evening; this was the only clear idea in his mind—everything centred in that.

At last, Miss Wilmot declared that she had concluded her business, and having secured from the library a novel she wished to read, proposed to return home.

Charles handed both ladies into their carriage, and prepared to leave them.

"But you are returning with us, are you not?" said Miss Wilmot. "My uncle has friends to dinner, and expects you."

Charles, in his dreamy quiet way, declared that he had an engagement, and could not return to Blackheath.

Miss Wilmot looked terribly disappointed; but all that Charles did was right in her eyes, and she did not

complain ; although it was in fact an understood engagement, and some of the guests had been invited to meet him.

Before the carriage was out of sight, Charles had instinctively turned his steps towards Russell Square. It still wanted two hours of the time appointed, but that signified nothing to him.

He knocked at the door, and was told that the ladies were within. He gave his card, and was shown across the hall into a parlour on the ground floor.

It was a substantial, respectable mansion, solemnly furnished, after the fashion of forty years before : heavy mahogany tables and chairs, a dim Turkey carpet, the walls painted a dull red ; the window curtains ample, but faded from their original colour into a tawny orange ; a large Japan screen filled up one end of the room, and sheltered a well-worn morocco easy chair.

Charles had not asked to see Kate ; it had not occurred to him as possible that anyone else could come. In a few moments the door opened, and Kate stood beside him.

A few hours previously neither of them had thought of meeting—it was too far removed from all likelihood to be the subject of a desire ; and yet, now that they were together, they were conscious of no surprise, it seemed as natural as light—the only unreal thing was their separation. There was no tumultuous joy at their reunion—only the renewal of the deep gladness they had heretofore felt in each other's presence. Kate Hatherton, who had exercised so much influence upon Charles Herbert's life, did not look in the least like a woman to inspire one of those mysterious, lasting, deep attachments, which seem the working of enchantment, or insanity ; but causes generally look less than the effects they produce. Kate Hatherton was a gentle-looking creature, with a well-formed figure, under the middle size. She could not be called beautiful, still less was she pretty ; but she had a pair of large soft grey eyes, with a touching, gentle look in them, which gave an indescribable charm to her face. Her smile was

lovely, and there was an expression of kindness and goodness in her whole appearance. She had not the air of one who had mixed in society, but the calm gentleness of her nature effectually prevented any tinge of vulgarity or awkwardness.

Her love for Charles Herbert was deep, entire, quiet, like her nature. He had appeared to her like a superior being when she first saw him at her father's house, and that she should love him was not wonderful ; but his deep, tender affection for her was more remarkable. He was her superior in station, education, talents, fortune,—in every material advantage of this world. It was the singleness of her nature that drew him, and he loved her in return with a singleness and reality not often possible in the complications of this ever shifting life.

For some time they neither of them spoke ; at length, Kate seated herself on a low seat beside Charles, and leaning her head upon his hand, she said,—“ Now we are seated as we used to be, long ago ; and now tell me when you came back from India, and where you have been.”

Charles did *not* reply by telling her of his engagement to Miss Wilmot ; in fact, it seemed to him to have been contracted under a mistake. He had told her of his attachment to Kate ; and, now that he had found her free, he believed that Miss Wilmot would, as a matter of course, set him free. This idea was so fixed in his mind since the moment he had met Kate, that it was like an intuitive conviction ; he never questioned it. Kate and he belonged to each other so supremely, that all idea of treachery or dishonourableness towards another was swallowed up.

“ But, Kate, you have been married ; tell me about that first.”

“ Oh ! ” said Kate, “ sometimes I felt nearly mad to think the light in which I must seem to you, and that perhaps you might never know how things really were, nor why I took the course I did. I wrote once to you ; but after a long time the letter came back to me. It had been sent to your father, so then I lost all hope, and

could only try to do right without thinking whether you would ever know."

"Know what, dear child? I never blamed you; I knew you were driven to that match by your father."

"Listen: when my father sent me away from you, he said many dreadful things about your family, which I was too miserable to understand, except that all the evil came from your being a Protestant, whilst we belonged to the Catholic Church. I was sent away to my cousin's house, and there I saw old Mr. Maryland: he often came. He was very ailing and low spirited, and I suppose thought he would like me to keep him company, for he proposed to my father to marry me. My father said he should, and then he told me that you had been sent to India by your father for thinking of me, and that your father had insulted him, but that if he were to consent fifty times over I should never marry you. What worked upon me the most was, his telling me that I had been the cause of a quarrel between your father and yourself, and that he would never speak to you or forgive you so long as I was in the way; so I thought at last that the best thing I could do was to put myself out of everybody's way, and do as my father wished, and I wrote you a letter to tell you everything, but it came back to me. I felt glad that Mr. Maryland was so disagreeable, for I thought if you heard of it, you would know I had not done it with any notion of being happy."

"And did you think, dear love, that I should be glad to fancy you were miserable?"

"Not exactly that," replied Kate, "but you would have preferred my being miserable to my caring for anybody else, and it would have hurt me to the heart if you had not. Well, we were married. Mr. Maryland was a great sufferer, and required constant attention. I felt very sorry for him, and it was occupation to attend upon him. I had been accustomed to sick people, having nursed my mother through her long illness before she died. Mr. Maryland was very hard to please at first, but he softened towards the last. I used to read to him a great deal when he could bear it, and he took pains to

teach me things, for he was very clever. His son was jealous of me, and tried to set his father against me, by telling him constantly that I was only waiting for his death to marry you, expecting to have all his money. He worked upon his father, who was very suspicious, until he made a will, by which my allowance was to go to the son if I married again. My father went to America, where Mr. Maryland had some property; he died the same month with my husband, two years ago last May, and then I went to live at Hampstead, with an old Catholic lady, a distant relation of Mr. Maryland's. I only came here upon a visit. I should have returned home to-morrow, so that if we had not met to-day, we might never have seen each other again."

Charles had listened to this long story for the pleasure of hearing her voice. The only point of any interest to him, connected with Mr. Maryland, being the fact that he was dead.

Kate had a singularly rich sweet voice, and anyone, even though not a lover, would have wished her to talk on, if not exactly for ever, at least for a long time, without being weary of listening. As she ceased speaking, the servant entered to lay the cloth for dinner.

"You have done right, as you always do, Kate," said Charles, rising. "I must go away, now; I will come again; make any excuses you can to your friend for me."

Kate would have remonstrated, but almost before she was aware, she heard the house door close behind him.

On leaving the house, Charles Herbert went to his lodgings; he had eaten nothing since early morning, but the strong tension of all his faculties had rendered him insensible to fatigue or hunger. He believed himself to be quite calm and composed, because his excitement was too intense to be exuberant. He began to write to Miss Wilmot the account of what had occurred, but the process was too tedious, he was unable to frame a sentence. He resolved to go and seek a personal interview, and tell her everything. He desired that a coach might be sent for, and in the interval of its coming, he

hastily swallowed some coffee, which his landlady brought of her own accord.

All the way to Blackheath he was still in the same strange waking sleep; he had one fixed idea, that he was going to break off his match with Miss Wilmot, but he pursued it like a sleep-walker, unobstructed and unperplexed by any of the difficulties that stood between himself and his object.

On arriving at the residence of Miss Wilmot's uncle, he was told that the gentlemen had not yet been called to coffee, and that Miss Wilmot was with the ladies in the drawing-room. He desired that she might be sent for; and he awaited her coming in the charming little room which was her own retreat, and was filled with her books and music, and furnished with the elegant luxury in which she delighted.

It was June, and the summer daylight still lingered; the window looked to the west, and commanded an unbroken view of a splendid sunset.

Miss Wilmot did not long keep him waiting. She wore a transparent white dress, with a light blue scarf, which she had the art of managing very gracefully. She entered with a light joyful motion, and looked very lovely. It is certain that in grace and beauty she far exceeded Kate.

"Oh, Charles, I am so glad you are come! How very good you have been! But what is the matter?" said she, suddenly stopping. "Are you ill? Have you heard any bad news? You do not look like yourself."

"I am well, quite well," replied he; "but I have something to tell you, and thought it best to come to-night."

"What is it?" said she, anxiously. "Anything that affects you?"

"Yes, Sarah, and it concerns you also. Can you stay and listen? or shall you be called to your guests?"

"Oh, no; my aunt will supply my place. Tell me, what is it?"

"I am come to ask you to dissolve our engagement. Since this morning I have seen Kate Hatherton, whom I

never thought to see in this world again. I give you my honour I did not seek her ; I did not know even that I still loved her, till she stood before me in that place you left me this morning. I cannot see what good it would do you to marry me, knowing what you do ; for I told you all that Kate Hatherton had been to me, and I tell you now all that she is. There would be no honour if I kept to my engagement when the first sight of her made me forget you—and myself, too. If I had been conscious of the hold she had over me, I would never have spoken a word to you, or to any other woman ; but it is too late to go into all that now.”

“Then were you quite indifferent about me? Did you *never* care for me?” gasped Miss Wilmot.

“I tell you, Sarah, that I did not know my own heart. I was not indifferent to you ; I cared for you more than for any other woman I ever saw—except one. I loved her before I knew you, and I shall love her till I die. It is because you are a good woman, and because you were my friend before I ever thought of you as my wife, that I come to you in this way, and because I thought you would see and feel how all this has befallen.”

Miss Wilmot sat completely stupified with the weight and suddenness of the blow that had come upon her. But in all wounds the great suffering does not follow immediately ; and she was astonished to find how little pain she felt.

After a dull pause, during which she pulled off the ring he had given to her when they became engaged, she said,—

“You are free, Charles—quite free. Here is your ring again. Will you tell my uncle, or shall I?”

“Let me tell him,” said Charles ; “and then, if he thinks it needful to blow out my brains, he can.”

“He will scarcely feel called upon to do that,” replied Miss Wilmot, with a slight bitterness.

Charles Herbert looked at her for the first time since the interview had begun. His eyes had certainly rested upon her, but without any personal consciousness that he saw her.

"Sarah, I hope, with all my soul, that I have been a coxcomb, and that you do not really care for me so much as I allowed myself to fancy. You will get over it; and no one who knows you can believe you to have been slighted."

A spasm of painful indignation passed across Miss Wilmot's face.

"Charles Herbert," said she, rising, "it is because I love you; it is because I was your friend before I was your affianced wife; it is because I understand your nature better than anyone else in the world is ever likely to do, that I do *not* blame you for what you have done this day. Now leave me; there is nothing more to say between us."

There was a noble tenderness in the tone of her voice, which, pre-occupied as he was, touched Charles Herbert's conscience: he would have said something in exculpation or explanation; but before he had recovered sufficiently to speak, she had left the room.

At the threshold Miss Wilmot was met by a servant, sent by her aunt to seek her. The guests desired music, and she was called to perform. No one who saw the fixed composure of her face would have surmised what had passed during her brief absence.

She sat down at once to the piano, and played one of those brilliant impossibilities which, whilst they are miracles of execution, endanger no tender sensibilities.

"I never heard you play that kind of music before," said her aunt.

"It is an old school piece, for which I once gained the prize," replied her niece, carelessly.

At last the guests departed, and Miss Wilmot was free to seek her own room.

She was still too stunned and confused by the blow, to feel all the misery that had come upon her. But as her maid unfastened her long hair, a sudden flash of consciousness darted through her, and she sprang up, crying with a piercing voice—"My God, it is all true, then!" and fell down in a rigid convulsion.

CHAPTER III.

ALL that night Miss Wilmot remained alarmingly ill, and the medical man, who was sent for in all haste, declared that it arose from some severe mental shock, and that there was danger of congestion of the brain.

This illness was a relief rather than otherwise to the deep sorrow that had fallen upon her; the bodily pain was a diversion from the real grief that was gnawing her heart. But it takes a great deal of grief to kill people; Miss Wilmot, at the end of a fortnight, was declared convalescent: neither the doctor nor his medicines could do anything more for her.

The first day she came down stairs she requested to see her uncle alone in her own apartment; it was the room where she had had her interview with Charles. Everything stood in its accustomed place, and the afternoon midsummer sun was pouring a glare of light upon the walks and lawn before the window, which could be perceived, although the room itself was shaded with Venetian shutters. The glare of an afternoon sun is not cheering, but rather oppressive, to those who are in sorrow; she desired the inner blinds to be let down, and lay, with her eyes closed, awaiting her uncle's coming. He came quite delighted to see her down stairs again, and asked her whether she expected Charles Herbert to come.

Miss Wilmot replied quite quietly and steadily, as if

she had been making an ordinary communication, that she had broken off her engagement on hearing from himself that a lady to whom he had been long attached, and whom he believed to be dead, was alive and free.

The old gentleman was first incredulous, and then indignant, and extremely curious to know all the details; after his niece had repeated the facts in a calm, consecutive manner, he reiterated testily,—"I do not understand it at all. I cannot tell what you mean by what you say; do you mean to tell me that he has forsaken you for another? If he has, he is a scoundrel and a jackanapes, and I shall tell him my mind pretty freely."

With a calmness that did not for a moment betray any sense of the intolerable irksomeness of his questions, Miss Wilmot again repeated the grounds on which she had dissolved her engagement, and intimated that she wished matters to be left as they were.

"Oh, well! if you are contented I am sure I am. I do not suppose you could care much about such a dreamy half-and-half fellow. You may do much better. I always wondered what you saw in him. You will live to be glad of this, for it is my opinion that he will never do any good. Somebody was telling me the other day they had always been a crazy family."

He might not have been so easily appeased, only it so happened that if Miss Wilmot died unmarried, her uncle would be her natural heir; so after a few well-meant exhortations to keep up her spirits, and not to give him another thought, he kissed her, recommended her to drink plenty of his old Madeira, and left her to herself.

She drew a sigh of relief as one released from the rack, and lay motionless; but after a few moments, her hands clenched convulsively, as quick thoughts darted through her like sharp knives. This return to life was the beginning of her martyrdom.

She rang the small silver handbell beside her, and her aunt entered, with a face full of sympathy and surprise, for she had just heard of what had happened from her brother-in-law. She would fain have talked the matter

over, and heard all the details of what had come to pass, but Miss Wilmot was not one easy to question.

"Aunt, I must write a letter that should go directly. Give me my desk; and will you fetch here all the things we ordered from Madame Rosine? I want to choose something from them."

"But, my dear, will it not be too much for you? don't distress yourself just now, I beg."

"No, no; do what I ask."

Miss Wilmot waited till the door closed upon her aunt, and then took from a secret drawer in her desk a few letters, not more than half-a-dozen, and detached from her neck a fine hair chain, which had been concealed by her dress; she held them for a moment, as though irresolute whether to read the letters, but seemed to shrink from the attempt, and made them up into a packet. She had scarcely done this, when her aunt returned, bringing a large flat pasteboard-box, the contents of which were spread out before her. There is scarcely anything so sickening as finery to those who are heavy at heart. There lay all the beautiful things which she had been so happy to buy, and every article of which had been chosen to please his taste.

She laid on one side a splendid wreath, that looked as though carved in alabaster, leaves and flowers all of a transparent white, and a beautiful veil that had been intended to wear with it.

"I think these will be all, thank you, aunt. Now, take the rest away, and put them where I shall not be likely to find them."

She placed the wreath and the veil, and her packet of letters, carefully in a box. And then (she had saved this till the last) she began to write a letter; it was breaking the last link of communication with the man so passionately loved, but there was a strange pleasure in speaking to him once more.

"I have not been well since you were here, or I should have written this letter before. I send you back all the letters I have of yours, not because I am angry or proud,

but I have no right to them any longer. I have kept a little drawing you gave me on board ship, in the days when we were *friends*. Never think of me except as a friend. Do not let any bitter feeling, or remorse, or regret, prevent your recollecting me as a friend, which you know I was of old. You are quite free from all engagement to me. You would never have entered into it had you known earlier what you only learned since.

"I send your intended wife a veil and a wreath, which was bought the day you met her again. Tell her I beg of her to wear it. She will, perhaps, never see me, but teach her to think of me as one who wishes her well, which I do from my heart.

"SARAH WILMOT."

The letter was written ; the last one, as she said, that she should ever address to him. She put it inside the box, and directed it herself. She insisted that a footman should be sent with it immediately. She watched the man from her window, till he disappeared down the avenue, and then leaned back on her sofa, looking with a strange stifling despair into the future that lay before her, and from which all hope and joy and desire had departed.

Her misery seemed greater than she could understand.

CHAPTER IV.

IF Miss Wilmot had indulged any secret hope that the heart of Charles Herbert would be touched with kindness towards her, she was deceived. A prosperous love in its earlier stages is the most selfish and engrossing of human things. Charles Herbert only thought that Miss Wilmot was behaving very sensibly; it was a great convenience to him to be set free from everything disagreeable, so he reverted to his old idea that she could never have cared much for him. He returned her letters, and wrote her an unexceptionable, gentlemanlike letter, which occasioned her such keen suffering by its tone of unconscious and cordial indifference, that it brought on a return of her illness, and on the day that Charles Herbert was married to Kate, she was lying between life and death.

Kate understood her better. When Charles showed her Miss Wilmot's letter, and gave the wreath and veil that had been sent to her, she said, in a troubled voice, "Charles, if Miss Wilmot should die, you will hate me because you have left her."

"Miss Wilmot will not die for the love of me," said he; "do not make yourself miserable about her, or I shall be sorry I told you of our engagement."

No more was said, and he thought no more of her remark. They were married; and to both of them it seemed wonderful how they had ever existed apart. Miss Wilmot was far cleverer than Kate; superior to

her both in mental powers and in attainments. She was much handsomer, and, as we have seen, a generous, self-controlled, noble-spirited woman. But Kate's very deficiencies were her charms. They called out the best qualities in Charles; and we love those who call our good points into activity far more than those who may be better in themselves, but exercise no such influence over us. Kate needed to be loved, protected, guided. Her intelligent passivity was to Charles an intense attraction; her whole nature seemed to fertilize under his culture. He loved her, and she seemed to think with his thoughts, and to live with his life.

They lived in great seclusion. Charles had few acquaintances, and sought no others. Kate cared for nothing in the world except Charles, and scarcely even kept up her intercourse with her friends in Russell Square.

Charles was thus removed from hearing any comments upon his behaviour to Miss Wilmot, and he seldom thought of it himself.

Their pretty house at Fulham, with its garden down to the water's edge, had been taken and furnished more with a view to what Miss Wilmot would have had a right to expect, rather than to what Charles with his own resources could afford. However, their expenses were small, and no immediate embarrassment was likely to ensue; but at Christmas an unpleasant report came to Charles respecting his tenant in Essex, which obliged him to take a sudden journey there, to see in person how matters were going on.

A severe snow-storm had rendered the roads almost impassable; and as Kate had the prospect of becoming a mother, Charles would not for a moment hear of her going with him. He went, and found things were rather worse than he expected,—it was a month before he could return home.

He was at once struck with a change that had come over his wife; he could scarcely have told in what it consisted. She loved him as devotedly as ever; it was not coldness, but a certain sadness and abstraction hung

over her like a mist, which he could not dissipate, neither could he divine the cause. She appeared to be quite well in health, and he could hear of nothing that had distressed or annoyed her; to all his entreaties and inquiries she replied, that nothing was the matter.

It might be about a week after his return, when one night she awoke him. She was sitting up in bed; her dark hair had fallen over her shoulders, and the bright frosty moon shining full upon her face, made it look pale and glittering. He started up in affright,—“What is the matter, dearest? Are you ill?”

“No,” said she, in a dry hard tone, “I am not ill, but I want to know the truth; are you really married to me, or to that other? You have been with her all this last month; it will not do to go on living in this way; sometimes I used to fancy it is me you married, but now I am quite sure that I am not your wife. I am not angry. I do not care what the world may say of me; but my poor baby—it will have to bear the sins of the father upon the children, and I have been trying to make up my mind to go away, and to leave you free for that other. It was very wicked in me to take you from her, but I will make restitution.”

She spoke the last sentences in a mysterious, confidential manner. Charles was inexpressibly alarmed. He said everything he could imagine to calm her, and to persuade her that she was under the influence of a dream; but it was not until he had darkened the room and shut out the flood of moonlight that he at all succeeded. She still spoke wildly about leaving him, but burst into tears, and cried herself to sleep like a child, in his arms. In the morning she was apparently quite well, and seemed to have forgotten all that had passed, and the cloud that had hung over her was dissipated for the time.

But the improvement was only temporary; her temper, which had been gentle and equable, was now abrupt and irritable; she became restless, and found fault with everything. The change was inexpressibly painful to Charles, though her affection for him continued

unabated, or rather increased, but it was with a vehemence and jealousy quite contrary to all her previous habits. He hoped it arose only from the nervous susceptibility incident to her situation, and as she never alluded to what she had said that night, he did not suppose it had any real hold upon her mind.

One evening, however, they were sitting after tea, Charles had been reading to her whilst she worked; he laid aside the book and asked her to play for him. She complied, but seemed unable to finish any piece she began. At length she rose and came back, and seated herself at his feet before the fire—they were both silent—at length she said, abruptly,—

“Charles, why do you try to deceive me? I am not your wife, and never was. I loved you too much to care for anything but being along with you. I liked to think I was wicked for your sake, but now my baby is coming I am beginning to think differently; it will have to bear my sins if I do not take them up myself; you know what is written about the sins of the fathers upon the children; and Charles, do you know I cannot read a chapter in the Bible but I find some verse that applies to me; there is one I cannot get out of my head, it is, ‘Whoso sweareth to his neighbour, and disappointeth him not, even though it be to his own hurt.’ Now that is neither you nor I; you swore to Miss Wilmot, and married her, and I took you from her. Well, I will bear for us both; my poor baby will be blameless. I am so wicked I am frightened to think of it; but I study all day long how I may save you and my baby. I must make restitution—I mean I will leave you, and you must go to Miss Wilmot, as you promised; you cannot be my husband while she lives.”

A burst of hysterical weeping as she said the last words left her calmer, but it was evident to Charles that nothing he said had any effect upon the fixed idea she had taken about her marriage; every day the delusion gained strength, and became more detailed. He called in the first medical man of the day, who had a great reputation for his skill in all female complaints, but he

could do nothing except encourage him to hope that she would be better after her confinement.

If Miss Wilmot had desired revenge, she could not have had it more completely. Charles watched the cloud that was settling upon his wife become darker and thicker every day. She took an aversion to him, and the sight of him was so distressing to her, that the physician entreated him to keep away from her, and she remained for days together plunged in gloomy abstraction, which was followed by extravagant spirits.

At length, the event to which he had looked forward with such desperate hope, took place. Charles became the father of a daughter, but the mother's malady seemed to have been rather aggravated. She recovered her strength rapidly, but her mind was quite alienated, and the two medical men gave it as their decided opinion that the only chance for her recovery lay in her removal from home, and being placed at once under regular treatment.

Terrible as it was to hear this, Charles felt there was no alternative, and it was on the anniversary of his wedding-day that he took his wife to a lunatic asylum.

CHAPTER V.

CHARLES HERBERT returned to his desolate home after taking his wife to the asylum. He was entirely stunned by the misery that had overtaken him.

It was a burning August afternoon, the sun was shining with an intolerable glare; the river, which twinkled through the trees, was alive with boats and small craft, darting about hither and thither; the grass, which had grown long upon the lawn before the house, was quivering in the intense heat; and the dark, dull foliage of the trees hung motionless, without a rustle; everything about the house was silent and lonely; no living thing was to be seen or heard. That intense silent sunshine is oppressively sad. The door bell sounded as though it rang through a deserted house, and the servant who answered the summons was evidently unprepared for her master's appearance. She, however, hastily assumed a sympathising cast of countenance, and inquired how the mistress had borne the journey. In reply to his inquiry, she told him that the baby was out with the nurse, that no letters had come for him, that no one had called, and then, after pulling an arm-chair from the wall and giving the table a final sweep with her apron, she retreated to the kitchen.

It was a pleasant ground-floor parlour where Charles was, with a long French window at either end, both

opening into the garden, down a short flight of stone steps. He and Kate had formerly made it their usual sitting-room; it had now the blank, stiff look which a room always acquires in the absence of its mistress.

Kate's workbox stood, locked, upon a stand in the corner; a basket of coloured wools, with an unfinished mat, stood beside it; nothing was out of place, and not a sign of occupancy broke the blank, rigid formality of the arrangement; the afternoon sun poured in with a sickly, unsheltered glare, making the furniture and carpet look shabby and comfortless. He could not endure to remain, and went hastily up stairs.

The first room he entered was the nursery. The nurse was still absent with the child; he wandered restlessly into every other room; last of all, he entered her room—which had been his also, until that attack of madness separated them; her dresses were still hanging in the wardrobe; her dressing-case (a gift from himself) stood upon the toilet, but the carpets had been all taken up, the window curtains and bed draperies had all been carefully pinned up and covered,—there was not the sound of a living thing to break the silence and loneliness of that desolate house, and yet to his overwrought nerves, it seemed as if the very silence were laden with strange weird sounds. He dared remain no longer, and returned with hurried steps to the parlour below. During his absence the servant had laid the cloth for dinner.

When that had been removed, the nurse came curtseying in with the poor little tiny baby asleep in her arms.

"Do you think it will live, nurse?" said he, drawing aside the flannel shawl in which it was shrouded. "It does not seem to thrive, poor darling."

"Bless you, Sir! and what can you expect from such a young baby? Gentlemen seem to think that babies ought to be all at once as fat and large as if they were six months old; you must give it time. Bless its little heart! it is as likely for life as either you or I."

Charles sighed. He thought that if it should please God to take it away, it would be far better than to live

and grow up under the doom that overshadowed its cradle.

"Nurse," said he, abruptly, after a pause, "you have had experience, and can tell me,—does it follow of necessity that because there is—I mean, because some of the relatives have been afflicted with insanity, that—that—all the children in the family must be like them?"

"Indeed, Sir, that is a mystery I could never understand. I don't make much account of a fever after a confinement; the lady may recover, and it leaves nothing behind; but with regard to what they call 'insanity in a family,' I cannot speak so surely. A great deal may be done by good training and bringing up, especially if other people don't go and talk nonsense, and put ideas into the person's head; for if anyone were to get a notion they are to go insane, and to let themselves go, without striving against it, it is my opinion they would go mad with the conceit of it. But a great deal may be done by striving. I have known more persons than you would think, who have kept themselves sane through just making up their minds to do so, though they have had enough to drive them that way if they had yielded. It is my opinion that God helps those who help themselves, in this as in other things; and I beg, Sir, if it were the last word I am ever to speak to you, that you will not let anyone breathe a word about its mother's condition to this dear little lamb."

Charles looked at the poor little pinched face of the baby that was now beginning to awaken; it was drawn into an expression of sadness and distress that gave it quite an old look. The nurse declared it was hungry, and "that the wind was troubling it," and hastened away with it to the nursery to console it there. But to Charles it seemed as if the shadow of the dread presence had already fallen upon the child.

All the strain and excitement of the last few terrible months were over, and he was now left alone in the collapse. He leaned his head upon the table, and wept bitterly, as men weep when the very foundations of their life are broken up.

But help, to a certain extent, was at hand for him, although he did not know there was a creature in the world who could assist him in his sore need and desolation.

When the servant, long after it had become dark, took the lamp into the parlour, she took also a letter which had arrived by the latest delivery. Charles took it with a nervous tremor, expecting that some fresh calamity had occurred. It was written in a firm, clear hand—every letter distinct and bold. It ran as follows:—

“DEAR NEPHEW CHARLES,

“It is possible you may not know that there is such a person as myself in the world, you were too young when I visited the Chauntry to recollect your father’s sister, Margaret; but I remember you well. I know the sorrow that has fallen lately upon you, and will not here enter into any attempt at consolation, which, however well intended, seldom or never answers the purpose. I have known sorrow myself, and can feel for you.

“My reason for writing to you is to ask what you intend to do with your child? You will need someone, some woman, to watch over her, and to bring her up. If you wish it, I will take charge of her, so long as I live. She may either come to me in my own home, or I will come and live with her wherever you please. And it may be that God in His mercy will keep the child from all evil.

“I am,

“Your aunt,

“MARGARET HERBERT.”

The letter was dated from Tatworth, in Staffordshire. Charles read it over twice before he could believe it real; but gradually and dimly the recollection of a noble and beautiful young lady, in a grey riding-habit, and a Spanish hat with a plume of feathers, came upon him. It was his Aunt Margaret, who came and remained a week at the Chauntry after his mother’s death, when he was some

seven years old. She had made a profound impression upon his imagination, she was so beautiful and different to everything that surrounded him. He recollected her black hair, her soft, white skin, and the delicate rose-colour in her cheeks. Her eyes had seemed to him like stars; he could recollect her carrying him up stairs to bed one night when he had fallen asleep in the parlour tired of play, and awakening as she laid his head upon the pillow and kissed him—it all stood out clear and distinct amid the dimness of those early days. He recollected the bitter tears he shed when she went away, he knew not how. The little book of birds and beasts and the knife she had given him were carefully cherished, and had a long lease of their existence. He recollected, too, that once when teasing his father to know when Aunt Margaret would come back, his father sternly bid him “never ask again,” and muttered, “worse than dead.” He had never seen his beautiful Aunt Margaret again; but he had divined that some mystery hung over her. His old nurse had told him “she would be a great lady some day, and perhaps send for him to London;” but bid him never let his father hear him speak of her. Gradually the impression she had made faded away, and he had not recollected her or thought of her for years; but now her letter, coming so strangely, awoke all these slumbering memories as distinctly as though they had occurred but yesterday. He wrote that very evening, earnestly inviting her to come and stay with him, and expressing his determination to fetch her himself on any day she would appoint.

We must now transport the reader to an old country town in Staffordshire. It consisted of one long straggling street of houses, of various degrees of pretension, most of them built of dark-red brick, some standing shrouded in gardens thick with trees and flowery shrubs, others contenting themselves with imposing flights of stone steps to guard the access to the front door, whilst the remainder were either shops or houses standing on a level with the street. At the head of the street was the market-place, and a brick town-hall, with an arched space

beneath used as a covered market; a pair of ancient stocks, more for symbolism than use, stood at the northern side. An old castle crowned a steep, round hill, covered with trees, now transformed into an ornamental plantation, and the moat into a flower-garden. Beyond the castle, over a zigzag bridge (said to have been built by the Danes when they occupied the castle), there was a straggling suburb, more modern than the rest of the town; rich meadows and pasture lands lay around, watered by the narrow crystal river which gradually gathered depth and force as it reached a small island, upon which a paper mill had been built, the only trade or manufacture of which the place could boast.

Not far from the mill, and under the shadow of the alders and willows which grew thickly thereabouts, stood a pretty romantic-looking cottage, very small, although it was dignified by the title of the MILL HOUSE. It was a weather-stained, unpretending tenement, with a red-tiled roof, picturesque enough in virtue of its situation and the beautiful American creeper which was trained over the porch, and the beautifully-kept garden in which it stood; but neither in style nor design had it any title to be "a cottage of gentility."

For many years the Mill House had been inhabited by a lady and a single servant: nothing positive was known about them, except that they came from "foreign parts," although they were both English. A certain traditionary respect had, in the course of time, gathered round them, and overlaid all the idle gossip and curiosity that might have been excited at their first appearance.

The lord of the manor, who spent part of every year at the old manor in Tatworth Park, always paid her the greatest respect. He was a grave, middle-aged man, and, people said, had been disappointed in his youth, and would never marry, or else he might have been suspected of intentions towards the stately lady of the Mill House; but nothing of the sort was ever said, or, if it had been, it had become an accepted fact that they were *not* to be married. The general belief settled down into the idea, that she was a lady of quality distantly related to him,

who lived in retirement on account of family losses. Indeed, there was a vague tradition that she had been engaged to be married to a nobleman of high rank, who had been taken ill and died three days before the marriage.

Madame Herbert, as she was called, was a gentle, dignified woman, of middle age, still possessing the remains of a sterling beauty, which must have been something dazzling in earlier life. She was a most noble-looking woman: at the first glance she seemed cold and stern; but the gentleness of her voice and the inexpressible sweetness of her smile banished the idea, and renewed all the fascination of her earlier beauty. Her magnificent hair was touched with grey; but her teeth were still as white and brilliant as those of a young girl.

Her dress was invariably black, always in the same fashion, and without the slightest ornament. Her gown had a felicitous simplicity of shape, which made it look like a royal robe. No mortal seamstress or mantua-maker of Tatworth had the fashioning of her garments: her old servant made them at home. They were of the plainest material: the only luxuries of apparel in which she indulged were lace and fine linen, of which she had a great store; and let her be seen whenever she might, she always looked as if she were dressed to go to court.

Her charities were large for her means, and judiciously applied—the curate and the parish doctors being her counsellors. Of course she dabbled in medicine, and an old wash-house had been set apart as a dispensary, where three days a week all the ailing people in the neighbourhood were free to come for medicine and kitchen physic. If she had a weakness it was this; but the parish doctor smiled benevolently upon her efforts, which relieved him of his most unprofitable patients. Those were not the days when “sanitary reform,” and the “improvement of the dwellings of the labouring classes,” had been proposed as social problems. But Madame Herbert was before her age, for she unconsciously solved them for those who came within her influence.

But it was not on the poor alone that her best influence was exercised, it was felt by those in her own condition of life. Tatworth was a small town, divided by all manner of party feuds and political jealousies. It returned two members to Parliament: one seat was liable to be contested, and parties ran to a height impossible in a place of more business; for two years the supporters of one candidate refused to eat or drink or speak, or even go to the same church, with the supporters of the other; and of course there was more than the average amount of gossip, scandal, and evil-speaking at all the card-tables in the place, and all manner of small *vendettas* amongst the ladies. Madame Herbert was a neutral person—everybody seemed the better for knowing her—in her presence scandal died away; her keen, clear good sense inspired a certain awe, and she had an instinct of human nature that enabled her to soothe many heartburnings, and to reduce much misrepresentation to the laws of perspective. She was not witty, and she was not remarkably clever, but she had the genius of common sense, Heaven's best and rarest gift to womankind. She was true and genuine in word and deed; her influence came from what she was in herself, and not from any eloquence of speech or persuasion. She had a singular faculty for calling forth the best qualities of everyone who came near her—the secret of all noble influence. For young persons she was especially excellent, they all confided in her and treated her as a chosen companion, the most touching flattery the young can show towards the old. Buried as she appeared to be in that obscure stupid country town, she was a haven of good influence that worked stronger and further than could have been defined.

Such was Margaret Herbert at the time we have introduced her to the reader. She was now, as we have said, near fifty years old. For some years after coming to reside at the Mill House, although she had kept up no intercourse with her brother or his family, she had been in communication with an old servant, and through her had been kept informed of all that took place at the

Chauntry. Death, however, closed this channel of information shortly after Charles Herbert's departure to India; but one evening, at a whist party at Councillor Jones', of Castle Mount, there was amongst the company an old gentleman, just come down from London on some election business. He was Madam Herbert's partner at whist, and looked at her with a frequency and intentness that much interfered with his play; at last, between one of the deals, he inquired abruptly, whether she were any relation to Charles Herbert, of the Chauntry, near Ingatstone?

"He is my nephew, Sir," replied the old lady, with some stateliness.

"Bless my soul! how extraordinary that I should meet you here! it only shows there is but one set of people in the world. Troubles have come heavy upon him, poor fellow. Have you heard how he is, lately?"

This was the first tangible reference to Madam Herbert's family or connections that anyone present had heard, and it produced a flutter of curiosity, but no one ventured to ask any questions, and Margaret Herbert having briefly replied in a way that conveyed no atom of information, the whist proceeded. Before she went home, however, she requested the old gentleman to call upon her the next morning, which he did, and it was through him she obtained the information that induced her to write the letter already laid before the reader.

A fortnight afterwards, the chief doctor of the town electrified all his patients by the astounding news that Madam Herbert was about to break up her house, and go to reside with her nephew.

Everybody was at first incredulous, but everybody had in the end to become believing, for the intelligence was confirmed by Madam Herbert herself. She announced that she had arranged with her nephew to take charge of his infant daughter; and ere the wonder and regret and surmise which naturally followed had done more than break the dumb silence into which the news had first thrown the society of Tatworth, Charles Herbert

himself arrived in chaise and pair ; and after being seen by very few of her friends, for he stayed but one day, he departed with his aunt and her old servant. The Mill House was shut up, the parish doctor fell heir to her drugs and recipes, and to her old pensioners, who were to feel no change from her departure, as far as money and material comforts were concerned.

All Tatworth mourned her departure, and many hoped she would come again, but she never revisited the place.

Her lot, henceforth, was cast elsewhere.

CHAPTER VI.

It was late in the evening when Charles and Margaret drove up to the door of his house at Fulham.

"Welcome to your new home, dear aunt," said he, kissing her hand, as he led her into the parlour, which now wore a look of welcome; the lamp was burning brightly, and the table set for a joint meal of both tea and supper. "Now that I have found you, and have you safe here, I hope you will never leave us again."

"I will stay with you as long as you need me, or as it shall please God to spare me," replied his aunt, speaking cheerfully, to disguise her emotion. "But is the baby asleep? or may we see it before we have tea?"

The baby ought to have been asleep, but babies keep arbitrary hours, and it pleased the one in question to be awake and looking about when they entered the nursery. The nurse looked somewhat stiffly on the fine lady come to be her mistress, and to go shares in the management of the baby. She held it with a half-injured, half-defiant air, as if it were the seals of office no one had any right to touch but herself.

"I think she thrives, nurse," said Charles; "it looks better than when I left."

"Of course it thrives, Sir! all the children I ever had the care of always thrive; nobody ever could say they did not."

"The little dear child!" said Margaret, stooping to kiss it; "it is a lovely baby! What name have you given it?"

"We would have called it after you if I had known you then; but we called it Constance."

"A very pretty name, and one that has often been borne in our family; one of your mother's names was Constance."

After a few kindly words to the nurse, who, however, did not relax from her stiffness, they departed. When the housemaid called in for the customary gossip before going to bed, the nurse condescended to say, that "as master's sister seemed to be a real lady, she did not so much mind having her in the house; but that, if she intended to meddle with her management of the baby, she should let her know who was mistress in the nursery."

The housemaid had nothing to say against her master's sister, but expressed her intention of "giving notice" if that old servant had come to stop and be a spy over her.

Whilst this was passing above, Charles was giving his aunt in detail the history of all that had befallen him, and going back into the early times when she visited at the "Chauntry." He was in better spirits than he had been since his misfortune; the pleasure of seeing a companion, and the excitement of having found and secured his aunt, had a certain romantic interest which, for the time, deadened his sorrow.

Men like Charles Herbert, with a constitutional taint of melancholy, require to be kept constantly amused from without, or the chained devil that lurks beneath that lazy, dreamy exterior will break his bounds, and drive them to madness or to crime.

The next day came the reaction.

After showing his aunt all there was to be seen in the house and garden, and transacting some trifling matter of business that had arisen during his absence, he again fell flat into the dreary misery of his present life.

It was after dinner; he sat in gloomy abstraction;

his head sunk upon his breast, and his feet listlessly stretched upon the fender.

His aunt sat in an easy-chair opposite, knitting diligently at a large shawl. For some time they sat silently, at last, suddenly rousing himself, Charles said, "You see, aunt, what it is; you have come to live with a man whose life is blighted, who has nothing to hope for—nothing to do; you have made a bad exchange from your pleasant cottage."

"And do you suppose, Charles Herbert, that you are the only man who has seen affliction?" replied Margaret, gravely, laying down her knitting and fixing her eyes upon him. "Go past an hospital at any hour of the day, and think of all the pain and misery that is shut up within its walls; every miserable individual there is suffering as much as he can well endure."

"That is quite true, aunt, but it is no comfort to me that others are suffering also; and besides, all their misery lies outside me—whilst my own has a certain stern originality to me, and is within my own skin, and cannot be argued or sympathized away by another."

"You speak of sorrow as though it were the worst thing that could befall a man, and was to be avoided or put aside by every kind of exertion. I think that is a mistaken mode of viewing, and as cowardly as it is unwise. No affliction is intolerable when it is accepted; the poisoned sting is that of our own miserable and exaggerated personality. Taken bravely, there is no calamity that presses so heavily but a man may find space to stand upright under it, and to walk on through life."

"Have you, then, suffered so much as to know from experience all the fine things you say of sorrow?"

"I have," replied she, gravely, "and I tell you that, now looking back upon the past, I would not part with a single experience I have gained through sorrow."

"You are a Stoic," said Charles, impatiently, "and consider pain no evil. What you say in such fine phrases reminds me of the old Scotchwoman, who, when the preacher was saying beautiful things about resigna-

tion and suffering, called out, 'It is fine for thee to talk with a haill heart; what dost *thou* know about it?' If you had seen the being you love most in the world stricken with madness, had seen her love for you turned to hatred,—if you saw that you were a source of evil and misery to all who loved you,—if you had been the means of giving life to an innocent child, born under a doom of terror that may any day overtake her, then you might talk of understanding sorrow, though I suspect you would not find so many fine things to say about it!"

Charles was excited, and began to stride up and down the room. Possibly Margaret had only intended to rouse him from his apathetic gloom, for she looked at him with the tenderest compassion, and then, after a moment's silence, said, "Tell me about Kate; I do not know her history, nor any of the particulars of what has happened; if it be not too painful, I wish you would tell me all from the beginning."

"It is a wretched story," replied Charles, "and may be you will think me a scoundrel who has only met with his deserts; but *she* was innocent, and why was not I alone punished?—if, indeed, it has come on me as a punishment."

"We cannot judge of these things: tell me about Kate."

Charles began, at first with some reluctance, but gradually the comfort of speaking without reserve to one who could understand and sympathize with what he said, "slid into his soul." It was the first time he had ever spoken upon the subject. Margaret's tears were the only comments she made upon his story; and though, when he ended, he lifted up his voice and wept with a passion of grief that seemed to shatter his whole frame, still he went to bed that night with a sense of consolation he had never dreamed would come. The next morning he was silent, but less gloomy; he joined Margaret in the garden, and of his own accord renewed the conversation of the previous evening.

"I cannot bear to look upon the face of that child," said he; "and I think I feel the lot I have been the

means of bringing upon her more than anything that has befallen myself. I could pray that she might die before she knew good or evil, and be taken away from the evil to come. If she should grow up and live to be married, the same infernal chain of circumstances will go on, and if she is kept from marrying, she will most likely pine to death from melancholy; or, perhaps, go insane herself,—such a destiny as lies before her.”

“But, my dear Charles, reflect upon the multitude of women who have to lead their lives without being either married or beloved; think of the women who marry unhappily; think of the numbers whose affections run to waste upon those who are not worthy, or who do not return them. It strikes me that the lot of Miss Wilmot, who, for no fault of her own, is suffering under a fatality that has brought down upon her the bitterest trial that can fall to a woman’s lot, is very hard. Yet, she is bearing it nobly; and why should not Constance be like her? We must pray to God for her that she may be strong with a wise and understanding patience.”

“Make her an angel, poor darling; but what then am I? To know that she is doomed to live under the shadow of madness, and that it is I, her father, who have entailed it upon her;—it is this, this that is the bitter sting in my grief.”

“Constance will not have to meet her lot suddenly or unprepared. She is a woman, too; and you forget that ‘suffering is the badge of all our tribe,’” said Margaret, smiling sadly. “She will, too, have a higher training than fell to your lot; and, with God’s blessing, there is no need that she should be miserable. It is no ignoble destiny to be allowed to sacrifice her hopes of a happy marriage, and of being the mother of children, in order that in her person the plague laid upon her family may be stayed. How many women strive for these objects—family ties and affections—attain them—and are disappointed!”

“If she were a Catholic,” pursued Charles, “I would make her a nun—give her to the Church as a ransom for the sacrilege they say was committed when the Chantry

lands came into our family: they have done us little good."

"You will bring Constance up well; you will be to her a friend as well as a father, and she will be a blessing and a comfort to you, and she will lead her life where it has pleased God to place her; and there is no reason at all why you should consider her as foredoomed to a wretched existence, or meditate shutting her up in a convent by way of adding imprisonment to her other blessings. You will find that life is not so black as you picture it."

Margaret spoke cheerfully; and Charles was more comforted than he would confess. After dinner he began to speak of his own plans. "This house weighs upon me like a nightmare. It was taken and furnished under the idea that I should have a much larger fortune,"

"Then why not let it, furnished as it is? You would get a good rent for it; and you might send me and little Constance, and her nurse and my old Nanny, down to that dear old Chauntry, which I have not seen for so many years. You may still retain the farmer for your tenant; the other part of the house will be quite as large as we shall need. You will go abroad and recruit your health; and we will keep a room always ready for you when you come down to see us."

"It will be dreadfully dull for you," replied Charles. "It may be early associations, but I cannot express the weight of melancholy that seems to brood over that old moss-grown house, even on the brightest day. A chill as from the grave falls upon me when I enter that cavern-like porch."

"My associations with it are pleasanter than yours. I wonder whether the old flower-garden and the 'Nun's Walk' are still in existence. That garden used to be a sunny place: I cannot recollect a gloomy day there! The bee-hives, and the beds of thyme and sweet herbs, and the hedges of roses! I have never seen such a garden as I recollect it. My dear Charles, I am old enough to have left off wishing, but a return to that old place seems like a fairy gift!"

"You are very good, aunt, to speak so kindly of the old place; but are you sure you would like it for a residence? and would it be a good place for little Constance? If you thought so, I would put the scheme in action directly."

"The sooner the better. You ought to travel. You need change; and I hold that no grief can prevail whilst you are moving about in new scenes."

"But it will be dull work for you to live there alone; I ought to stop at home and look after my property, instead of running away the instant I have enticed you to give up your own plans to keep house for me."

"You may do all that when you return, at present you are the first person to be considered. Go to Switzerland, to the high Alps; dwell amongst them for a while, and you will find your own sorrow hushed before the still, solemn grandeur of nature. When you are in the presence of those strong 'everlasting hills,' you will feel how little it signifies what becomes of yourself. The tumult of your own small existence becomes an impertinence amid the motionless repose and strength around you; no utterance, however passionate, of human sorrow, is worthy to break the silence that is kept by those dumb, awful mountains, and the pine woods, which seem to have become penetrated with their spirit. The rivers and cataracts are the only approach to life and movement capable of asserting themselves, and even they seem very little things. To stand thus face to face with Nature in her fastnesses, subdues all vain thoughts, and carries one out of one's personal life, as no other influence can. A man who has once been entirely penetrated with the sense of this 'Awful Presence of an unseen Power,' can never again feel 'cumbered about the many things' of his own egotism."

"Had the dwelling amongst the mountains this influence upon you?" asked Charles Herbert, looking with surprise upon the kindling eyes of his aunt, which were not looking at him, but gazing forwards into space.

She heard his question, however, and replied to it as though scarcely conscious of speaking :

"Yes; I went there in deep suffering, and after the shipwreck of all hope for this life."

Charles looked troubled; he knew that there was a history attached to his aunt—of what nature he was ignorant, and he was fearful of saying a word that should indicate a desire to touch upon her secret; he therefore said, in a light tone:—

"You are an enthusiast, aunt; the mountains would not do so much for everyone who visits them."

"I suppose I am tainted with the family malady; but even madness may be mastered—and then it can teach many things," replied Margaret.

"Well, but I have no companion; and I tell you frankly, that just now I should dread to encounter those grim Silences alone. I have an inexpressible dread of being alone—someone must join me."

"Send us down to the Chauntry at once; it will be an amusement to me to settle our new home; arrange your affairs here, and look about for a companion; you will have no difficulty in finding one; only travel, throw yourself into adventure, and break up the routine of your present life and all its miserable associations."

Charles did not dislike the idea, and the rest of the evening passed in discussing various routes, the cities and countries he desired to visit. Margaret fetched down old maps and guide-books; she had travelled much during one period of her life, and whilst thus following old memories, and retracing long-past scenes, she seemed transformed into quite another creature.

Charles looked at her in amazement; a strange beauty, like a gleam of sunlight, lighted up her face, and brought back the recollection of the Aunt Margaret who had carried him up stairs to bed, years ago, when he was a little tired child.

CHAPTER VII.

MARGARET did not allow the idea that had been started in that evening's conversation to die away; she treated it as a matter absolutely agreed upon, that Charles was to look out for some means of getting away from his present wrecked and dismal home, but in the enthusiasm of the moment she had overlooked one signal difficulty in the way of a tour to Switzerland, or anywhere else. The war then going on with France obliged English people to stop at home, or to cultivate their taste for travelling within their own boundaries. Considering the instinct of the English "to travel, foreign countries for to see," the enforced obligation to stop at home must have had a curious and little suspected influence upon the adventurous "Lord Batemans" of that time. We have no doubt that many sincerely-repented-of trips to Gretna Green would never have taken place if Paris, or Italy, or the Rhine had offered their agreeable distractions to the devoted Henrys and Emmas, whose affections flinty-hearted parents had lacerated and torn asunder, regardless of all the finer feelings of humanity. But that is a speculation beside our purpose.

The conversation had so far done good, that it awoke in Charles a certain desire for occupation, which was at least a break in the dead, dreary level of misery in which he had been stranded. By a remarkable stroke of good fortune, this occupation offered itself to him very unex-

pectedly, and quite without any effort or seeking after of his own. He received an offer, through his father's old friend, Sir Simon Letheby, of an appointment up the country in the Bombay Presidency, superior to the one he had formerly held; the emolument was considerable, and there would be a retiring pension. It was altogether such a good thing, that he could scarcely believe it was placed at his disposal. He had certainly shown great capacity, and acquired a knowledge of the routine of affairs when he was out before, but that alone would scarcely have availed to open the career to him again. As the possessor of the Chantry lands, he had the power to dispose of the family borough, which of course gave him an importance and weight which would not have been commanded by the size or value of his estate alone, and this made it worth while to serve him.

"Well, Margaret," said he, going to her with the open letter, "read that, and tell me if you do not think you have brought me good fortune; it is as good as what you were wishing for me, with the additional advantage of being paid well for accepting it. I feel better already for the prospect of getting away. There is not much time for preparation, which is so much the better. Can you take a run with me to-morrow down to the Chantry, to see what arrangements must be made for you and Constance, and the nurse? I will write a line at once, to bid the people there have beds prepared for us."

Margaret was only too much delighted at the prospect. Charles moved and spoke with the alertness of a man with new life infused into him; the bustle and excitement of preparation was what he always liked.

He wrote a prompt acceptance of the post, and made the return required by delicately placing all the votes and interest of the Chantry at the disposal of Sir Simon.

The next day Charles and Margaret went down to the Chantry.

The part of the house fronting the farmyard had been let, along with the furniture, to a farmer, named Lacy, who also acted as bailiff to the estate.

It was a bright warm afternoon when they arrived, but the rooms still retained the peculiar earthy smell common to old houses, despite the large wood fires which were blazing in all the grates.

A large pleasant parlour, looking into the flower-garden, with a glass door that led out upon the "Nun's Walk," had been set out with preparations for an old-fashioned country tea. In the centre of the table was an immense bush, rather than bouquet, of common garden flowers. The roses and sweet-briars round the casement were in full bloom, and wild, untrained luxuriance; the sun came streaming in through the small diamond panes of the low wide casement-window, which had been flung open.

"Ah! how well I recollect this room!" said Margaret. "It used to be the 'tea-room,' a sanctuary seldom thrown open; there are the dear old-fashioned straight-backed chairs, with their covers of tent stitch! and that portrait of your mother, how well I remember it; a stately-looking woman in a white damask sacque, drinking tea out of a Japan china tea-cup,—that child standing beside her would be your elder brother, I suppose?"

"No; it was a child who died before Ralph was born; a bright, beautiful boy, remarkable for his intelligence; the loss of him nearly broke my poor mother's heart, and the next baby that came was an idiot! *He* lived, as miserable creatures to whom death would be a blessing always do."

"Come, let us have tea," said Margaret, cheerfully; "I am not going to let you be miserable and misanthropic to-night. What are either you or I that we should complain?"

"I was not complaining for myself, though Heaven knows I have little to be thankful for. I was only remarking on the general way in which things fall out in this world, the best taken away and the worthless left."

"In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, and their departure is taken for misery, but they are in peace," repeated Margaret, in a low voice, as though speaking to herself. "My dear Charles," continued she,

gravely, "do you suppose that you are the first man who has been assailed with these bitter questionings? They are to us, in these days, what those enchanted forests, Armida gardens, and evil spirits in disguise, are fabled to have been to the knights and heroes of old, who 'descended to dark places to slay monsters for us;' we must encounter *our* spectres, even as they did,—we must encounter them with our life. They can only be lived down by the might of faithful deeds. Whatever work we find under our hand, day by day, will carry us through that day; and step by step, even to our lives' end. We may be no nearer solving the problem of the universe, but we shall have fought and conquered our own demons, and saved our own life from insanity; and, as we go on, we shall learn to stop our ears, and to refrain with our lips, and go steadily upon our own way, and the evil spirits will cease to whisper."

"You are a mystic—I daresay you believe what you say; but do you mean to tell me, that all the misery in the world is only the suggestion of my own mind?"

"Not in the sense you use it. I believe that our life is in the midst of an invisible world, pressing upon us on all sides; the things which are seen are but for a very little while; they are all passing away, and we are passing away who use them."

"Well, but they are real enough whilst they last," said Charles; and by your own showing, they are as lasting and substantial as we ourselves, and will see us out; so I don't perceive what you want to prove."

"It is through all that doubt, and discouragement, and misery, deep and wide-spreading on all sides; misery of our own, so heavy that 'our strength faileth for trouble;' misery of others, appealing to all our fellow-feelings, and we unable to raise a hand to save or to deliver those whom we love best from the dark hours through which they pass before our eyes; it is through all *this* that we must keep our faith and our courage, and lead our life to the end."

"Faith—in what?" asked Charles, abstractedly.

"What time my heart is overwhelmed, my trust is in THEE."

"Ah! I remember hearing something like that sung once; is it by Pergolesi, is it not? it is fine—very. If one might have music like that to accompany our life, as soldiers have when they go to battle, it might put heroism into one sometimes; but you see our life and errors are all flat, unaccompanied prose. But, come; if you have finished tea, let us go over the rooms up stairs before it goes dark."

They went up stairs. Over the parlour they had left was a large bed-room, that had been the private apartment of the Lady Abbess when the Chauntry was in the possession of the Church; it was low and raftered; the window, which was low and wide, spreading along half the side of the room, was filled with small, dim, discoloured panes of glass, and the light was still more obscured by the thick stonework in which it was set; opposite to the wide fireplace, paved with Dutch tiles, was a small closet with a groined roof and arched window, still retaining sundry panes of stained glass; it was now festooned with cobwebs, and the place choked up with old lumber, but it had once been a private chapel.

"This was your father's room. You see the furniture, though old, is suitable; there is little wanted to make it comfortable. I forget this door, where does it lead?" continued Margaret, opening a small door beside the window, which disclosed a short flight of stairs through the thickness of the wall.

"Those were poor Ralph's rooms; he was kept there as a child—neither my mother nor my father would have him far away from them; our room was in another part of the house."

The stairs led them into a circular turret, built, like a swallow's nest, in the angle of a wall, and overhanging the garden; it contained two small rooms, one within the other, lighted by narrow lancet windows, and commanding a view on all sides.

"This would do admirably as a nursery for Constance,"

said Margaret; "and she would be constantly under my own eye. How could you ever call this place dull? I think it quite fascinating."

Charles did not hear her; he was leaning against one of the windows, and looking earnestly out into the distance.

"See, Margaret," said he, placing her before him, "Kate used to live at that white thatched house, as far as you can see; there is the path across the fields where I went to meet her; she used sometimes to be waiting for me at that tree, by the windmill; a little on this side of it there is a wooden bridge, and there I saw her for the first time. Oh, Margaret! when I think of *then* and *now*, my misery is greater than I can bear! Will all your religion bring back the past? will it give back her precious reason?" and he bowed his head against the window-frame, and wept aloud.

Margaret offered no words of consolation; she allowed his grief to take its course, soothing him as a mother might soothe her child.

When he became more calm, she drew him from the turret. He insisted, however, upon going through the rest of the apartments.

There were four other bed-rooms in the long passage; and Margaret began to discuss their furniture, and to talk of bed-hangings, presses, and carpets, as though the world contained no other object of interest.

"Oh, Charles, how could you call this place dull! it will be like a country palace, as you will own when you come back to us again! Until then, the place will be too large for us. All those rooms up stairs, this parlour, and the small one for a dining-room, and that charming old ivy-covered out-house for Nancy's kitchen, she will fancy herself in Paradise; and the air will be so healthy for Constance."

"I was never happy here," said Charles. "I believe the place is under a curse."

"We will change it to a blessing, then," said Margaret, cheerfully.

The next day they returned to Fulham. Charles's

preparations for India, and Margaret's plans for removal, proceeded with celerity. What furniture they needed was sent down to the Chauntry, and, as the house at Fulham had been taken for a term of years, it was advertised to be let furnished.

At the end of a fortnight, Charles escorted his aunt and her household down to Essex, and formally installed them in their new abode. He himself was to sail for Bombay the week following.

His last visit before leaving England was to the asylum where he had placed his wife. He was only allowed to see her at a distance in the grounds, where she was being wheeled for exercise in a garden-chair. They told him that she had had several violent attacks of mania, alternating with fearful fits of despondency.

The medical superintendent did not conceal from Charles that he considered it a very bad case; that disease must have been going on unsuspected for a long time, and that he feared her mind was permanently alienated; the violence of her mania would subside, but only to give place to idiocy.

"Can you then give me no hope, Doctor? none?" gasped Charles Herbert, with despair.

"My dear Sir," rejoined the doctor, a sagacious, benevolent-looking old Scotchman, "I might easily *tell* you to hope; but it is better you should look the probabilities in the face like a man. Her bodily health is at present greatly disturbed, when that is restored, I can speak with more certainty; but the mischief has been going on much longer than we suspect. She has been nourishing some morbid idea until it has become a fixed delusion. She is naturally tenacious of impressions, and even when in health you would never be able to efface any notion she had once fairly taken up, and that makes a bad subject to work upon. Were any other members of her family ever deranged, do you know?"

"I have heard that her mother's sister died in an asylum, and I have been told, since I brought her here, that her mother was very strange at times."

"Ah!" said the doctor, taking a pinch of snuff, "the

mischief goes further than that, I fear. However, my dear Sir, rest assured that all, that all means shall be tried to bring her round ; and you shall have a regular report sent you of her state to any address you will leave. We must hope for the best."

Charles rose with a heavy sigh ; there was no more to be said ; still he lingered. He desired and yet feared to catch another glimpse of her who had been, who still continued, so dear to him.

He requested to see her apartments ; the doctor willingly assented. He was one of the first who recognised the wisdom of treating the unfortunate creatures under his care as much like rational beings as possible, and he had introduced many improvements upon the old method of treatment.

Kate had been provided with a female attendant, a strong, determined, but by no means harsh-looking woman ; and the two rooms appropriated to their use, though very dreary, were quite as good as was then supposed necessary. The windows were high from the ground, and guarded by thick iron stanchions, the furniture had all been removed, with the exception of a strong wooden chair and a table, a leathern thong lay on the floor beside it, and a fire burnt brightly in the grate, safely fenced by a strong wire-guard.

"She has been violent since she came, and we fasten her to the chair to prevent her from doing herself a mischief," said the nurse, seeing the eye of Charles fixed on the leathern thong. "We use no more force than is necessary for her good."

Charles shuddered. "But is there nothing to amuse her ? no books or work ?"

"Bless you, Sir, she tears everything to atoms she can lay her hands upon. Patients of her kind are very destroying ; but she shall be well done to, never fear. But you had better go now, Sir, if you please. I hear them bringing the lady back, and it would not do for her to find you here."

Charles hurriedly placed in her hand a handsome gratuity, and uttered some injunctions which were inarticu-

late through his agitation, and followed the doctor, who turned hastily down a side-passage. A loud cry, half shriek, half laughter, rang through the passage they had just quitted; changed as it was, Charles recognized the voice of Kate, and it rang through his brain for many a day afterwards.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARGARET soon established herself in her new abode. Under her hands the place assumed a quaint, sedate cheerfulness, which it had not known for more than one lifetime.

Her apartments, having all a south aspect, were warm and sunny. Her large sitting-room, leading to the garden, was so much changed in its appearance, that no one who had seen it in its previous grim, cheerless, "best parlour" state, could have recognised it. A Turkey carpet in the centre of the floor, with the black oak boards bright and shining round its edges; a large, old-fashioned sofa, covered with chintz, gave it an aspect of almost luxurious comfort; whilst Margaret's own belongings, relics, and memorials of her past life, imparted a warm, homely emphasis to the whole. Her own ebony chair, with its cushion of rich, though somewhat faded brocade, was placed beside the window; her footstool and a small japan table stood before it. There is always some one spot in a room which recommends itself, and is instinctively selected; this was Margaret's place,—here she read and knitted, or sat, as she was often prone to do, in abstracted meditation. Old Nanny had been established in a small kitchen kingdom of her own. What help she needed was to be afforded by a sturdy dairy-maid; she had refused to have a fellow-servant, as she did not choose to have "*a sister near the throne.*" The

upper rooms had undergone a similar transition from dreariness to comfort ; Constance and her nurse had the turret to themselves ; the lumber-closet had been restored to its original destination as an oratory, but into this no one ever entered, save Margaret herself.

With only the help of one of the farm-boys, the flower-garden grew into order and beauty, without losing its bright luxuriance. The fruit trees were trimmed and brought into shape, and made a pleasant shelter to the two long green alleys which led from the "Nun's Walk" to a corresponding though somewhat narrower gravel walk on the other side of the garden.

After she had duly made her appearance at the parish church, all the country families within visiting distance came to call upon her. Charles, during the period of his residence, had renewed the family acquaintances, which had fallen into abeyance during his father's time, and they came in solemn state to call upon his aunt.

Generally speaking, they were frank, kind-hearted, unpretending people, who lived upon their own estates, and seldom visited London. The gentlemen farmed their own land, drank hard, hunted three days a-week during the season, were justices of the peace, knew every man, woman, and child on their estate, and lived in a certain handsome hospitality, but without aspiring to the style they might easily have supported. As travelling abroad had been rendered impossible by the war, of course they were full of what were called "wholesome English prejudices," and all the domestic moss and rust which would naturally gather under the circumstances. They were all Tories—all Church and King men—hating reform and Jacobinism in every shape, and devoutly believing that cotton-spinning was destined to be the ruin of the country. A certain yeoman simplicity pervaded their household ; but they were abundantly conscious of their own position, and a silent pride in themselves, and a contempt for all who were not "landed proprietors" lay beneath all their apparent indifference to style and show.

The distinction between town and country was then as broadly marked as night and day. All the country

gentry kept carriages, of course—it was in those days a badge of quality. They were seldom used, but when occasion took them abroad, the majority of them drove four horses.

Margaret Herbert had a family right to take her place amongst the gentry, and she made by her own merits a most favourable impression upon her neighbours. Her polished manners and dignified bearing rather abashed some of the squires, who thought her too fine a lady; but her pleasant conversation procured her pardon. Some were puzzled how it came to pass that they had never seen nor heard of her before; but the supposition of a “family quarrel” accounted for a great deal. They would all have died before they would have given a sign of recognition to poor Kate, had she come amongst them, but they softened at the sight of the worse than motherless Constance. All that had been unpleasant or peculiar in the days of old Squire Herbert was forgotten; and all the ordinary forms of country neighbourhood were duly offered to Margaret. As she had no vehicle except a pony chaise, and no post-horses were to be had nearer than Chelmsford, the carriage was always sent to fetch and take her home from whatever house the party was given at. These gatherings were dull enough: except the agricultural interests and the price of markets, no topics excited much conversation. The state of the Continent (except as the war affected prices) and all the great interests that were at stake, were only seen and heard at a great distance, dimly, and chiefly through the small loopholes of the county paper. Still, those who could have looked into Margaret’s heart, might have seen that she was pleased with these ponderous hospitalities, quite independently of their own merits.

She, however, nearly made shipwreck of her popularity and respectability together, by her anxiety to establish a school in the neighbourhood of the Chauntry. There was a kind of “Goody Two Shoes” Green, surrounded by cottages of different degrees of comfort. At the head of it stood a handsome house and windmill. The girls belonging to the different families had gone to

a dame-school, kept at present by an old woman who was quite past her post : she was deaf and nearly blind, consequently the girls got much more harm than good by going there. The boys who were too young to go to work in the fields, went to learn what Dame Trotter could teach, or they were able to receive. The Green, and the conduct of the rude boys and girls who constantly gathered there—professedly to look after the cows and sheep, or geese, which might be enjoying the right of common—greatly disturbed Margaret. But her efforts to have Dame Trotter pensioned off, and a more efficient school established, brought her under the suspicion of being a Jacobin, who wished to introduce sedition and revolution. She never could have succeeded by any amount of reason or argument, had she not found two stanch allies. One, Squire Ramsden, was a jolly country gentleman, an inveterate bachelor, who cared for nothing but field sports, and was the hardest rider and drinker for thirty miles round—he advocated her plan with a zeal that was remarkable, as he had never been known to read a book in his life. He paid visits to Margaret, would listen to her plans as long as she would talk to him, and declared with enthusiasm at meetings of justices—riding to cover—in the hunting-field—at dinner-parties—wherever, in fine, there were people to listen—“that Madam Herbert was the only wise woman he had ever met with, and that it was their duty to support all she proposed.” Her other adherent was the clergyman of the parish, a non-resident except in the hunting season ; and he said, “that if Madam Herbert had a fancy for taking the Green in hand, he would be much obliged to her ; for they were a bad set, and needed mending, and she might have his blessing, as well as consent, if that would help her.”

Thus sanctioned, Margaret found full employment, and organized a village-school on her own plan, both for the girls and boys. It was but a small leaven of good she was able to introduce, but she did what she could ; and whilst Constance was little, she gave up a great deal of her time to it.

She might have been promoted from Madam Herbert, living with her nephew, to become Mrs. Ramsden, of Ramsden Hall, if she had been so minded.

Her staunch ally, Squire Ramsden, laid himself and all his old family possessions at her feet, soon after the new school had been set going. Margaret refused his offer.

"Ah, well," said he, looking ruefully in her face, "I was afraid I was not good enough for you. You are the only woman I ever did ask: you were my first love. When you were down here years ago, and I was a young fellow, I could neither eat nor sleep for thinking of you. You whisked away on a sudden; your brother would tell me nothing. He was a queer fellow, Squire Herbert; he looked as if he would eat me when I asked for you; and I never could get to hear what had become of you, or I would have walked to the world's end for the chance of winning you."

Although Margaret could not respond to this constancy, she did not convert him into that worst enemy, an offended lover. On the contrary, to the day of his death he remained, as he phrased it, her "humble servant," though he never renewed the subject; attending upon her, and doing her a hundred neighbourly kindnesses, admiring her beyond all words, and behaving more like an honest, faithful dog, than a rejected lover. No woman was ever insensible to the generosity of a man under these circumstances, who will be her friend, do her kindness, and keep silence on the forbidden subject; if any course *will* win a woman to change her mind, it would be this. But the friendship must be shown, "looking for nothing again!"

Little Constance gradually passed through all the phases of babyhood, the first steps of walking alone and attempts at the true "primeval language." She grew a lovely child, full of intelligence, but manifesting a precocious intelligence and passionate sensibility, which made her a difficult and trying child to manage wisely. Her attacks of passion were like outbreaks of insanity when they occurred, and a mere trifle was often quite sufficient to excite them. Squire Ramsden was her great friend

and playfellow, and could always bring the "black dog from her back" more successfully than anyone else. Constance felt instinctively that it astonished and pained him to see her lie upon the floor kicking and screaming with passion, and that he wondered and thought seriously of it long after she had forgotten it and her aunt had forgiven her; she did not like it to be taken so seriously, so that whatever clouds might be gathering, cleared off on the appearance of the Squire, and even a full-grown fit of naughtiness was generally startled away at the first sound of his voice. He gave her a little pony and side-saddle on her fifth birthday, and taught her to be fearless of everything. Sometimes when the hounds were to meet at the woodside, near the Chauntry, he took her with him to cover, Margaret following in her pony-chaise, but this was not often. Margaret kept steadily in view that the life of Constance would have to be an exceptional one; and she did not choose to have a love for admiration and excitement stirred up within her. An extreme susceptibility to praise and notice, which yet was not vanity, made Constance a difficult subject to manage. A great deal of what looks like vanity, both in children and grown people, might be traced to an intense desire to be in *sympathy* with those around them; it indicates an excitability of nature liable to become easily disorganized; but it is not vanity, it has reference to *others* in the first place, and to *self* only by implication. The peculiarity in Constance (although all children have more of it than is suspected) was her instinct for divining and sympathizing with what those around her were feeling. She knew, though no one had told her, *why* it was that Squire Ramsden came so much to see her aunt; she knew that her aunt did not care for him as he did for her. She divined that underneath her aunt's tranquil gentleness there was a something she never showed or uttered, and that this silent *something* was what made her aunt different to everybody else she saw; but she had no curiosity to find out what it was,—a sentiment of respect and delicacy underlaid all her childish thoughtlessness and passionateness; she had

none of that mischievous indiscretion that possesses children to utter anything they may have seen or heard at fearfully inconvenient seasons ; from her most childish days, she revered what she felt by instinct another would not wish to have made known.

Margaret adopted the best possible plan of dealing with such a child ; she left her alone. She did not teach her anything beyond reading and a little spelling, and allowed her to be as much in the open air as any gipsy ; above all she cultivated *silence*, not that she pretended to be cold or repulsive to a creature she loved with all the garnered affection and tenderness of her loving heart ; but silence and quietness were necessary elements to prevent so passionate and impulsive a nature from consuming itself.

The scenery about the Chantry was of a peculiarly tranquil, pastoral character, not flat, for there were not fifty yards of perfectly level ground for many miles round ; gentle undulations and varieties of surface prevented the rich green fertility from becoming monotonous or wearisome ; the country was richly studded with noble trees ; the luxuriant hedge-rows, flanked upon each side by a deep ditch, were tiny forests of brambles, brushwood, and trailing bushes, and showed that not an idea of economising land had entered into the farming calculations of those days. Charming little nooks of English landscape scenery were to be seen at every turn of the high road, which never extended many yards in a straight line, and wound between slips of green common on each side, where donkeys, horses, sheep, cows, geese, belonging to the cottagers, were to be seen picking up such a living as they could find, watched by children too young for other work. Windmills, or old Saxon-looking churches, were visible upon every hill. Hamlets of bright-looking cottages, some of whitewashed lath and plaster, others built of shingles, weather-stained, moss-grown planks, with their roofs of red tiles, and trim gardens before them all, scattered round a broad, bright, unenclosed green, flanked by a pond where their live stock might live at free quarters. In Essex every object

still bears a peculiar old Saxon look. Some of the farm-houses and barns have an air of having stood before a Norman ever came into the country; the very land has a quaint old-world look with it. Marshes and bleak tracts of country there certainly are, but nothing could be more lovely and luxuriantly peaceful than the scenery amid which Constance passed her days.

In the centre of a large, park-like meadow, about half-a-mile from the Chauntry, was an avenue of stately elm trees; the meadow had once formed the boundary of the enclosed grounds of the Nunnery, and the remains of an old wall were still standing. There had once been a large tank of fresh-water fish, but the masonry was now broken and fallen in, and the ground around it was trampled into a mire by the heavy hooves of the cattle when they came to drink. This avenue was Margaret's favourite walk whenever she extended her walks beyond the garden. During the fine days, Constance nearly lived under these trees, all her treasures were stored away in the hollow places at their roots; she built doll-houses and nunneries with the moss-grown masonry of the old ruins. The nuns, who had lived there so long ago, took great hold of her imagination, and she never wearied of making her aunt tell her what the country looked like, and what the people of England did, in those days.

So time passed on. Letters from Charles came at regular, though distant, intervals; he had long given up all hope of his wife's recovery, and, although he spoke with affection of his "baby Constance," it was evident that he did not much realize her existence. Apparently he had relapsed into the dreamy indifference which formed one portion of his character, and to be going on living because he had begun. Poor Kate's disorder had subsided, as the medical men foretold, into a gentle, painless, smiling imbecility; she was removed from the asylum about two years after the departure of Charles, and placed under the care of a widow lady willing to take charge of her. The only absences of more than a day that Margaret ever made from the Chauntry, were when

she went to see that the poor invalid's small range of enjoyments and comforts were duly attended to. She reserved her mother's history to tell Constance when she should be old enough to understand the obligation it laid upon her.

Margaret had no desire or intention that Constance should go into a convent, or take refuge in any species of religious exaggeration ; but she steadily turned the current of the child's enthusiasm and imagination into the channel of admiration and reverence for all who had greatly denied themselves, and voluntarily renounced all that the world considers worth having or gaining, for the sake of doing good to others. When they were together under the avenue of elms, she willingly told her stories of the noble women and saints of long ago, who gave up all manner of greatness and grandeur for the sake of leading a noble and holy life. She endeavoured to invest the idea of renunciation and self-denial with an heroic attraction beyond any personal gratification.

Constance had a noble nature, and her childish imagination was kindled by these stories ; she turned with wonderful indifference from the golden carriages, handsome princes, and sparkling dresses, with which virtue was rewarded in the fairy tales and nursery stories, which were not by any means withheld from her. Margaret, too, was wise, in that she never taxed her beyond her strength, dealing gently even with that "foolishness" which the wise man declares "is bound up in the heart of a child."

But the impression was made, and the bias was given, towards self-discipline and self-hardness. From her youngest days she was taught to look upon it as a privilege, and not in the light of a hardship. Constance, as a child, was none the less happy for having the germ of a noble motive instilled into her life, since Margaret had the wisdom to leave it to grow and mature naturally and gradually ; she was not working for herself, but for her precious charge.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Constance was ten years old, a letter arrived from Charles Herbert, announcing that he should come to England by the next vessel. He had been away quite long enough for this to excite no surprise. He had risen in the service, and, according to all ordinary calculation, must have acquired money; he had every right to return in peace; but to Margaret there was something in the tone of the letter that disquieted her. Not a word was said whether the return was to be permanent, nor any indication of his future intentions given.

Constance was in a fever of delight at the intelligence. Her papa, and her ideas of all the wonderful things he must have seen and done, were always a fruitful theme to her imagination; her notions of the East being gathered and compounded from the Bible, Pilgrim's Progress, and the Arabian Nights.

When the news came that the ship had actually arrived, and that he would be at the Chauntry on a certain day, her agitation and impatience made her really ill. At length, on the day appointed, a post-chaise covered with dust rolled into the yard, and drew up before the grim dark porch. Constance followed her aunt to the door: two gentlemen descended; she recognised her father by his likeness to her aunt, and stood cold and trembling with agitation. Charles Herbert had not come prepared to experience much emotion, but the sight of Constance,

and her startling resemblance to her mother, quite overcame him; hastily catching her in his arms, he carried her to the parlour, looking long and painfully into her face, which he held at a little distance from his own.

"Papa—you are my papa—speak to me," said Constance.

Her childish voice relieved him from the spell; the voice was like that of Margaret in its tone.

"Bless you, my child! my dear, dear child!" said he, kissing her passionately, over and over again. "I had forgotten you were not a baby still, as I last saw you:" and then, with a deep sigh, he turned to Margaret, and greeted her. "You, at least, are not changed!" said he. "This is Mr. Marchmont, my friend and adviser; he must pardon being overlooked."

Charles at the moment heartily regretted that he had brought his companion down with him; he would have given much to be alone with those whom, until now that they stood before him, he had grown to think of with indifference. The sudden unscaling of the torpor which had held his heart for years was like the pang with which men are said to revive from drowning.

Margaret was hurt and annoyed that a stranger should have been brought amongst them the first evening of reunion, besides which, she took an instinctive dislike to Mr. Marchmont as to a man of evil omen.

Yet he was a tall personable man, of gentleman-like address; his manner was calm and courteous, his complexion was dark, he had a long and rather well-formed face, a massive forehead, wide upon the temples, a straight and decidedly handsome nose; he ought to have been good-looking, but he was not. The peculiarity that repelled Margaret, lay in his eyes; they were large, and not ill-shaped, but they might have been two thin pieces of polished slate set in his countenance, so hard, shallow, and stony was their expression. His teeth, too, had a remarkable physiognomy; they were exceedingly white, the side teeth were long and sharp, whilst the two front ones projected slightly over the under lip. He smiled

upon Margaret when Charles presented him, but the formation of the teeth gave the smile a peculiarly sinister expression.

His conversation was, however, undeniably agreeable, and his voice extremely soft and pleasant. He had sufficient tact to glide into his awkward position of third person in a family re-union, without rendering his presence irksome. Margaret had no fault to find with him, except that she did not like him.

Charles had come down for the ostensible purpose of looking into his affairs, as well as of seeing his family; and the next day, accompanied by Mr. Marchmont, he began a tour of inspection. Mr. Marchmont did not look like a country gentleman, or an agriculturist, but Charles showed great deference to his opinion, and he appeared to take much interest in the condition of the estate.

An extensive plan of improvement was announced; rents were to be raised, farms re-divided, and some of them thrown together in one; improved methods of farming were propounded, which, perhaps, were improvements, but that did not render their introduction the less obnoxious.

Charles was received with anything but blessings, whilst his companion, who was in mourning, as he alleged, for his wife, was regarded as little better than the Evil One himself!

The country gentlemen, who all came to welcome Charles Herbert back to England, looked with haughty reserve upon his companion; and questions as to who this Mr. Marchmont was, and where he came from, were broadly asked of Charles. "He was a gentleman;" "had been a barrister, and was retired from practice;" "possessed house property in London," "and his family was settled in Yorkshire." Yorkshire being a long way off, and a wide county, none of the inquirers could possibly ascertain his standing. His soft, pleasant voice, courteous manners, and sinister face, did not please the neighbourhood, and he was treated with a silent hauteur which contrasted strongly with their boisterous, jovial

cordiality amongst themselves. Mr. Marchmont rode remarkably well, which was a point in his favour, although how he came to do so was an anomaly for which they could not account. He professed an ardent attachment to field sports, and could talk with the keenest sportsman amongst them all; though one old squire remarked, that "it seemed against nature for a man like him to talk of fox-hunting as if he had been a Christian!" Also, he understood horses, and displayed a pedantic acquaintance with the merits and pedigree of all the horses of note in the country; he knew all the technicalities of the minor amusements of badger-drawing, rat-hunting, cock-fighting; but it seemed knowledge only, not genuine love of sport, and made no impression in his favour.

After a little while, during which he had tried to conciliate the good graces of the gentlemen, finding that he did not succeed, he treated them, in his turn, with a certain easy indifference, which baffled and annoyed them, because they did not know how to resent it, though they cursed it for "cool impudence."

On one point he came certainly far behind them. In a society where every gentleman considered two bottles after dinner as only a reasonable allowance, he could not be induced to drink anything beyond a little home-brewed ale or cyder; he alleged a dangerous illness, and the commands of his physician. Of course it virtually excluded him from their dinner-parties, and gave them a reasonable excuse for hating one who was not, and never could be, an honest fellow or "a good companion."

Marchmont seemed inclined to bide his time, and in the meanwhile devoted some pains to ingratiate himself with Margaret and Constance. His success was by no means signal. Margaret occasionally taxed herself with injustice towards him, but she was not the nearer liking him; and she was, moreover, tormented with an anxiety she could not master, as to the nature of his influence over Charles. Constance did not admire him in her heart, but as he devoted a good deal of his time to amuse her, treating her, moreover, as though she were "a

grown-up young lady," her judgment was not proof against this delicate flattery. Charles did not take nearly so much notice of her.

He had a haggard, anxious look; the lines on each side of his mouth were deeper than formerly; and there was, underneath apparently jovial high spirits, an air of disquiet and unrest; it was no longer grief for the condition of Kate and the breaking-up of his home; but a pressing, corroding vexation which he apparently endeavoured to stifle and think as little about as possible. He eagerly accepted all invitations, and was as little at home as he could contrive to be.

Why Mr. Marchmont should remain a guest at the Chantry, where his host was so little his companion, was a mystery to Margaret; and Constance vaguely felt that all was not right.

A room adjoining his bed-room had been appropriated to Mr. Marchmont's use, and here he spent much of his time writing, drawing up long documents, and going through certain long and (to judge from their look) highly-complicated accounts. Constance had the right of *entrée* into this room whenever she pleased; indeed, he professed to like to see her there. One day she abruptly asked him if he knew why her papa did not look happy, and why he went away so much?

"I do not know, my princess; why do you ask me?"

"Because I thought you were sure to know."

"But why do you think he is unhappy?"

"I feel that he is. One feels those things without knowing them."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Marchmont, with one of his smiles.

"And do you know, that, sometimes, when I have looked at him, I fancied ——" she stopped suddenly.

"What have you fancied? You may tell me?"

"Why, that he had done something wrong, and was tormented to think of it."

"I do not know that he has," replied Mr. Marchmont, gravely. "Do you think that is the only reason why people are unhappy?"

"It must be the worst. Did not King Solomon say 'a wounded spirit who can bear?' and it must be dreadful misery to feel anything within you, different to what you say and do."

"I hope you may never meet with any worse misery in life," said Mr. Marchmont, resuming his writing, and leaving Constance nervous and uncomfortable at having said what she feared now had been wrong. She sat twisting her fingers, wishing with all her might that she could recal her words, and fancying that she might have done her papa a great deal of mischief. As Mr. Marchmont took no further notice, but seemed absorbed in his occupation, Constance crept softly out of the room, and went to ease her mind by telling her aunt all she had said.

"You have done no mischief, my child," said Margaret, kindly, "though your papa might not like to feel that you watched him. In one thing you are quite right; there is no sorrow or misery equal to that of not being at ease with yourself; seeming all right outwardly, and hiding within the consciousness of some secret action that you dare not make known."

"I know what you mean, now that I have told you what I had said to Mr. Marchmont. I am not afraid of anything; you know exactly, and do not think me different to what I am."

"You must learn to be a judge to yourself, my child. You will not have me always, and no one can relieve you from your own responsibility. If you do wrong, it is not the less wrong because you go and tell someone of it, nor because you have done it from a good motive. However wise or desirable the action may seem at the time, it is always a mistake, and will work as one. A very clever man once said of a 'LIE,' that 'it seemed strength in the beginning, but was weakness in the end;' and that holds true with everything done or uttered that is not right. Will you recollect that?"

CHAPTER X.

THAT same evening Charles returned from a dinner-party after all the inmates of the Chauntry had retired to rest, with the exception of Mr. Marchmont, who was apparently sitting up for him, since, after waiting some little time, and finding that he did not enter, he opened the door of his room suddenly, and caught Charles in the act of passing with stealthy steps towards his own bedroom. He started a little, and said, with an air of annoyance, "I thought you were in bed and asleep by this time!"

"You hoped so, you mean. You must have seen the light in my window as you crossed the yard. However, come in now. I expected you hours ago."

Charles yielded with a certain dogged reluctance. He flung down his hat, and threw himself moodily into an arm-chair before the fire. A round table, with a couple of Turkish pipes, tobacco, and the materials for brewing a jug of hot punch, stood by. Mr. Marchmont took a chair opposite to him with unmoved eyes, and a smile that revealed the peculiar expression of his teeth. "Come, a bowl of punch, and a cool pipe, will do neither of us any harm, and we have some business to settle."

Charles Herbert was not exactly intoxicated, but he had drunk enough to be quarrelsome. "You are come to tempt me to sell my soul, I suppose, but I will not. Neither will I drink punch with you, my spoon is not

long enough. I believe you are the devil, and I will have no dealings with you."

"Very well, then, there is no more to be said; the devil never tempts a man to go against his inclination. We may as well go to bed. I shall most probably be gone before you are down to-morrow: I have ordered my horse to be at the door by half-past six o'clock. I have gone through your accounts; they may pass now. As I have made it out, you are deficient exactly two thousand five hundred pounds seven shillings and eleven pence three farthings. Had anyone else been the auditor, you would have been brought in for another fifteen hundred; but I have swamped that amongst the miscellaneous items, so you may reckon it as good as given to you. There will be a meeting of the Directors in three days from this time for the dispatch of business, and your report must be given in. You know your own resources the best. For my part, I cannot conceive what you did with all the money at that out-of-the-way place in India—how you contrived to make away with it is a mystery."

"That is my concern, and is no more to the purpose than the source of the Niger to a man drowning in the Thames," said Charles, sullenly, rousing himself to an attitude of more attention, as he saw Mr. Marchmont gather up sundry documents neatly docketted and tied together with red tape. "Let us hear your ultimate proposal."

"As you please," replied the other, calmly. "I am not driving a devil's bargain with you, inasmuch as the penalty will not be exacted from you. As a matter of business, I am scarcely doing an advantageous thing for myself; for, in all likelihood, I shall never be the better for it. Your estate, well managed, might be made worth eight hundred a-year; but you have interest to pay upon that mortgage, which is a drawback. To raise the money you want immediately, you would have to try another mortgage, pay heavy interest, and become, as you surely would, irretrievably embarrassed. I offer to advance you the money you require, to manage your estate, and to ask

for neither interest nor principal during your lifetime; at your death, the Chantry and all the lands belonging to it pass, into my hands for ever. Of course, whatever improvement I make in the value of the land is for my own benefit; you receive the income you have hitherto done, which I think you stated was about five hundred clear, in good years."

"Lands that have been in the hands of my family for generations to pass into the hands of a ——"

"Finish," replied Mr. Marchmont, coldly.

"I mean," said Charles, "that you could never settle down in this neighbourhood; you see they will not accept you. I have done all I can to present you to the people; but caste is as strong here as in India. These country squires have not the tenth part of your brains; but they will no more associate with you, the son of a horse-jockey, than a Brahmin will eat bread with a Soodra. I cannot help it. I have vowed you are a retired barrister, of good family; but instinct and nature cannot be deceived. I nearly got into a quarrel about you to-night: one of them asked me how I came to be linked in with such a cold-blooded leech?"

"Ah, indeed! Who might it be?"

"Pardon me; it was after the third bottle, and had it been otherwise, I should not give up anyone to your deadly, unforgetting, unforgiving malice. I only mentioned it to show you that the land could do you no good—that you would never be received amongst these landed squires, had you the Chantry lands and a dozen estates to boot. Leave me at least the chance of redeeming them; I will pay you whatever interest you will exact."

"Thank you; but that will not suit me. My interest will be raised from the improved management of the estate, which must be made over to me unconditionally and absolutely, and I engage not to claim it during your lifetime. You make an excellent bargain for yourself."

"And my child will be penniless."

"Save from your income; deny yourself somewhat, and make a provision for her. You know it is written,

that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children; which comes, as I take it, in the shape of natural consequences."

"I am in a cleft stick, anyway," said Charles, bitterly; "and you take me at disadvantage."

"Not in the least. You staved off the evil day in India by expedients far more ruinous, and you see where they have landed you—three days hence you are a disgraced and broken man. If I had inherited ancestors, I should consider a good name better than lands. Besides, your exposure would entail other liabilities, and the total ruin of this estate you hold so precious. I lay before you an advantageous offer. I am your friend and benefactor."

"I am born under an evil star, and it has pursued me ever since I was born," muttered Charles.

"The evil will not come to pass in your days, and that is more than most could bargain for. Well, what do you say? You must give me your final answer at once."

"Why do you ask me? as if I could resist! You know I am at your mercy; be it so, and let us never speak of it again," said Charles, turning away his head.

"Speak of it again we must; but it shall pass on into silence as soon as possible. I will have all the deeds, transfers, and, above all, the money, ready for you by Wednesday—you hear?"

"Ay, I hear—I hear; leave me now, at least."

"It is late. Good bye, then; for I shall not see you again before I depart. Recollect that Wednesday will see you a free man again."

With an unmoved eye, and a smile which to Charles looked like a mocking triumph, Mr. Marchmont gathered together his own papers, and left the room.

Charles sat gazing absently upon the white ashes and blackened fagots of the decayed fire, his heart filled with bitter, weak regret for the past course of his life—a past which, as he looked back upon it now, seemed as if it might so easily have been guided into honour and prosperity. "What good has my life done me?"

murmured he ; “ would that I had never been born ! ” He sat in a dreamy painful reverie until the house clock struck five, and he heard sounds of life and occupation in the farmyard and house below. He roused himself, and went to his own room, where he remained until late in the following day.

The real reason why so many foolish and wicked acts are done under the sun, is not from the presence of strong passionate temptation, but from the softening produced by habitual want of self-discipline and self-sternness, which leads a man to let himself go—and he finds himself in miry places, where *some one act, with a name to it*, lies like a stepping-stone to escape. It comes handy ; immediate convenience is a stronger band to draw a man on to perdition than all the storms of passion or gusts of temptation that ever were brought to bear, and it leaves him, too, with less chance of escape. Shakspeare talks of “ the devil, opportunity ; ” but “ convenience ” is by far the more fatal devil of the two.

We must tell the reader how it came to pass that Charles Herbert found himself in the power of Mr. Marchmont, and also who Mr. Marchmont really was—which, being somewhat of a digression, we shall make as brief as possible, even at the risk of leaving the reader to ask questions to which no answer has been provided !

CHAPTER XI.

GOETHE says, "with renunciation life begins." The *Book of Wisdom* says, "Make not haste in time of trouble." The Gospel says, "He that loseth his life shall find it."

If Charles Herbert had been a man of noble nature, the dim, desolate calm that followed the uprooting of all his happiness—the misfortune that laid waste his life—might have been transformed for him into the "Sublime Despair," out of which the noblest deeds have been wrought for the world.

It is only when men can cease to hope or fear about what may befall themselves, that they are enabled to give themselves without reserve or stint to some work or labour they feel to be worthy; "their reward is with them, and their work before them,—their life henceforth belonging not to themselves but to their work, whatever that work may be. These men are they who succeed in finding the 'life' that begins in 'renunciation,' who meet with the healing comfort that 'they make not haste' to find; who rise to a higher 'life' than the one they are willing 'to lose.'" A great sorrow is a gift to be pondered over, to be learned patiently, and its secret worked out into life and action.

The working of events, in the natural course of cause and effect, will call a man to as rigid an account of the

use he has made of the sorrow, as of the prosperity that has fallen to his lot. If it has remained a bitter barren problem, to be complained of, to be as much as possible escaped from ; if it has only brought forth cowardliness and self-compassion ; woe to that man, for the consequences of a sorrow so received will fall heavily indeed !

Charles Herbert was not a bad man ; so long as he had been happy and comfortable and at ease, many amiable and attractive qualities appeared to shine in him ; but he had no faith or energy to stimulate the sluggish leaden current into which his life had been paralyzed ; he could see nothing in or beyond the material details of the event that pressed so heavily upon him ; he believed in nothing, he had hope in nothing beyond himself. With much power of indolent endurance, he was self-indulgent to the core. He hated suffering—he shrunk from it, and sought only to put the thought of it as far from him as possible. He had no notion of self-control or self-government : what he felt, that he believed in, and in nothing else.

Many men take to drinking to distract their sorrows ; but drinking was not a temptation to which Charles Herbert was accessible. He was, from peculiarity of constitution, incapable of finding any pleasure in drinking. It did not obscure his reason ; indeed, the more he drank, the clearer and more perspicuous his faculties appeared to become ; but, in the same proportion, it developed a wretched, miserable depression of spirits ; an utterable disgust and weariness of life, and a disposition to quarrel ; none of them exactly pleasurable emotions. Charles Herbert was safe from ever becoming a drunkard.

But it is not to be supposed that the Devil, who sets an example of industry, in his vocation, as the author of evil, should allow all the capabilities in this vacant, drifting, objectless existence to pass him by, because he could not take possession of it in the name of drinking.

The stimulus that drinking did not offer, gambling

produced. Charles Herbert had never been in the least conscious of any inclination that way, but he was now to discover it. During the tedium of a long calm, he one day listlessly accepted the challenge of another passenger to learn Lansquenet.

A strange, fierce, new sensation glided into his heart like a stream of fire. For the first time he knew the energetic pleasure that lived in the dice. He had a gambler's temperament, and the true passion of his nature was awakened; under its touch he started up into a new and maddening sense of life. When Charles Herbert landed in India, his whole nature, such as it was, had received its development.

His first station was up the country, in a remote place, where opportunities for high play were not to be had. Here he gave in to speculations of various kinds with the Government funds that passed through his hands. Some succeeded, others failed; but it was too ponderous and slow, the excitement not worth the risk. With the exception that he was not using his own money, the process too much resembled ordinary business to convey any pleasure; he, however, continued the practice, for the love of money had been awakened in his heart. He desired to be rich. A pining desire to make a large fortune at a stroke, a panting hurry to be, as he phrased it, "independent of fortune," kept at bay the new thirst for gambling during the years he was at Omaraboola. Had he continued there, it is possible the passion might have ultimately assumed a business-like shape, and he would have settled down into a miser.

Whilst he remained at this station he did well, his speculations were successful on the whole, and he acquired what might be considered a moderate fortune. At the end of seven years he was removed to fill a more responsible post at Calcutta, and from that time his ruin might ostensibly be dated.

The fatal facilities for high play surrounded him on all sides; he plunged into a vortex of gambling, all the more madly from his long privation. The speculations

into which he recklessly entered were the most insane and dangerous risks. He appeared entirely to lose his head for business. The failure of a banking scheme, to which he had given his name, gave rise to his sudden and entirely unlooked-for recal to England. A concurrence of untoward circumstances combined to complicate his position. So long as he remained in India he contrived, by various means, to keep his official accounts apparently straight, but he was perfectly conscious that, even with the sacrifice of all he possessed, he could not face the examination into his proceedings which he knew would take place immediately on his return. Other liabilities were hanging over his head: ruin and exposure stared him in the face, whether he went or whether he remained. At length, by raising money at an enormous sacrifice on the large retiring-pension to which he would be entitled (if he got through the ordeal), he was enabled to return to England to see what he could raise upon his English estate to meet the exigencies of his position.

The individual who had speculated upon the reversion of his pension, and who had consequently a certain interest in his welfare, saw him on board a vessel that was returning earlier than the one by which he was expected, and, along with much advice and counsel calculated to keep him from cutting his throat, gave him a card to

“MR. MARCHMONT,

“Amen-square,

“Barrister, — Chambers,”

with a few talismanic ciphers written on the back of it. “Go to that man,” said he, “if he be still above ground—and I have not heard of his recal below—he will pull you through, if anybody can; but have no reserves with him, make a clean breast of your position, and he would cheat the Devil himself on your behalf, if necessary; so hold up, my boy, the game is not done. I am willing to take the odds upon you, yet.”

The signal for the boat to return cut short the conversation. Grasping Charles's hand, with a hasty "*bon voyage*, and better luck another time," Charles's friend and creditor jumped into the boat that was pushing ashore, and the good ship "Mainwaring" pursued her course.

It may seem strange that a man of Charles Herbert's temperament did not either cut his throat or jump into the sea, under the aggravated circumstances in which he found himself. Certainly it was no moral courage or self-control that hindered him; but, in the first place, there was no immediate hurry, and suicide is an act that always is committed in a hurry at last, upon the sudden spur of some aggravating thought, even although it may have been a contemplated act; moreover, bad as matters looked, "the game was not up yet," and might take a lucky turn before it was done. Almost unconsciously, he attached great faith to the card his friend had given him to Mr. Marchmont, as to a man who could pull him through his embarrassments; it was a reserved chance, upon which he placed great dependence; finally—and this consideration had some weight with him—his life had become in some sort a debt of honour; the retiring-pension, upon the chance of which he had raised the sum that enabled him to leave India, would be forfeited by the act, which was besides always practicable as a last resource if things became too bad to bear. It is this possibility which keeps more men in desperate circumstances alive, than is at all suspected. Of course, we speak of those who are not restrained by moral or religious considerations.

They reached England after a speedy and prosperous voyage, which gave him again an additional respite, as the vessel by which he was expected, was not looked for until the end of the following month. Charles proceeded the day after they landed to the address indicated upon his card. It was a dull, quiet old square, with grass growing amongst the stones, full of large, dark, tumble-down looking houses, which had been the dwelling of very fine people in their day, no doubt, but which now

were chiefly printing-houses, or lawyers' offices, or lodging-houses for clerks. A couple of green trees were still growing at the end of the square, which was not a thoroughfare, the last surviving relics of some stately garden which had once existed there.

The house to which Charles was directed stood alone, in a square, red-tiled court, at the end of a narrow passage which opened out of this square. It was of red brick, with stone corners; an old flight of square stone steps led up to the door; the windows, in small, heavy-framed sashes, and looked dark and blinking, offering no sign of habitation. "Marchmont" was on a half-effaced brass-plate upon the door, which was kept anomalously bright; and the steps, though old and broken, were quite white and clean. Charles rung the bell, which was answered by an old woman, who showed him across an entrance hall, paved with black and white squares of stone, up a broad flight of stairs with heavy massive oak balusters. On the first-floor landing she stopped, rung a bell that hung beside the first door, threw it open, and desired him to sit down a moment, until Mr. Marchmont was at liberty.

It was an old-fashioned sitting-room, with a high wainscot that had once been painted white; a tall, heavily-carved wooden mantelpiece; two windows at one end looked down into the court below, and commanded a view of a labyrinth of houses, red-tiled roofs and chimneys, with a distant glimpse of a burying-ground; but all was as still as though in the heart of a desert. The furniture of the room was old and dull, and it had the appearance of a professional man's receiving-room. In a few moments the door at the upper end of the room opened, and Charles, to his great surprise, saw an individual who was perfectly well-known to him!

"Ah, Mr. Herbert! I am glad to see you again. When did you return?"

"I came expecting to find a stranger," said Charles, somewhat embarrassed; "the name is similar, but I did not connect it with you in the least."

"My dear Sir, there is but one set of people in the

world, from Kamtschatka to New Zealand. You must not expect to find strangers anywhere. I had a letter only this morning from our mutual friend, informing me that I might expect a visit from you."

"Ah, indeed!" said Charles, uneasily, feeling, he scarcely knew why, as if he had got into a hole from which he could not draw back.

"Will you give yourself the trouble of coming into my private room, where we shall talk more at our ease?"

Charles followed him into an inner room, considerably smaller than the one they quitted; an old-fashioned fireplace, lined with Dutch tiles, stood cornerwise; a counting-house desk, with a heavy ledger upon it, occupied one side of the room; and a large press, with a sliding door, which was half drawn back, revealed shelves and pigeon-holes filled with documents neatly stowed away. Mr. Marchmont seated himself in an arm-chair, covered with black leather, after placing a similar one for Charles, exactly where the light from the window would fall upon his face. Mr. Marchmont was the identical individual at whose house Charles had visited Kate after their unexpected meeting, and from which she was married! The marriage had taken place so soon after their meeting, and they had kept up so little intercourse with anyone during the brief period of their happiness, that it is not very wonderful Charles Herbert should have made no inquiries about Mr. Marchmont's profession,—a matter in which he did not take the smallest interest.

"You seem surprised, my dear Sir," said Mr. Marchmont, quietly, taking a pinch of snuff. "I was well acquainted with the late Mr. Maryland, and had a great respect for his widow, whom you married from our house, and it was with real commiseration we heard of her malady; she did not look in the least like a person liable to such an affliction,—it was a painful occurrence, very painful; and now, as we are not strangers, pray tell me frankly in what way you wish me to serve you?"

Mr. Marchmont certainly appeared to be endowed with the fabled faculty of the rattlesnake to induce his victims to enter his open jaws of their own accord, with his calm, courteous manner, agreeable voice, and dark stony eyes fixed upon Charles. Charles, as if under the influence of a spell, felt himself induced to lay the whole of his affairs open to Mr. Marchmont, without the slightest equivocation or reserve. When he ceased to speak, Mr. Marchmont was silent, made a calculation upon the back of a letter, and then, after a few moments' consideration, he said, quietly,—

“I have no doubt but that I can set you free from your difficulties—that is, if you will yield to my guidance. I have every disposition to serve you. If you are not stopping with friends, I think you had better take up your quarters at my house in Russell Square, until I can spare the time to go down with you to your place in Essex.” Meanwhile, you can announce yourself, and we will begin the examination of your accounts at once. The first step is to ascertain exactly what your liabilities are. I suspect you somewhat exaggerate them, or, at least, that they may be considerably reduced.”

He rung the bell, without giving Charles an opportunity of declining his proposal, desired the old woman who answered the summons to fetch a coach, and employed himself until her return in putting aside the ledger, and locking up his papers, in perfect silence.

When the coach was announced, Charles made an attempt to assert his free-will, and decline Mr. Marchmont's proposal. He was courteously but imperatively overruled.

“My dear Sir, we have no time to spare for formalities; trust me that I know what I am doing when I request the pleasure of your society in Russell Square. We will call for your portmanteau as we go along, and I will see to the clearing out of the rest of your luggage to-morrow. At St. Paul's Coffee-house, I think you said you were stopping?”

He gave orders to the coachman, and he drove off.

As they went along, Mr. Marchmont informed Charles

that he had recently lost his wife, and feared, for that reason, his quarters might be less comfortable than when a lady was at the head of the house.

At length they stopped before the door in Russell Square. Mr. Marchmont descended from the coach, Charles followed like one in a dream, and feeling as if it were the affairs of some other person he was transacting. They crossed the hall he so well remembered, and entered the parlour where he and Kate had sat together the first time he visited her. Nothing in the room was changed—the very furniture stood in its accustomed place: the room looked a little more dreary and shabby than formerly—that was all.

CHAPTER XII.

THERE are people whose energy appears all to evaporate in a string of fine Christian appellations at the head of their name. We have heard a grave and matter-of-fact friend declare, that no one with a number of fine Christian names was ever good for anything. How that may be as a general rule, we cannot venture to assert, but it is certain that Mr. Marchmont set store by fine names. He had been christened John; and John alone; but when he came of years to sign his name, and to be conscious of sonorous sounds, he converted himself into John Phillip Villiers—March—was his father's lawful appellation, and the one by which his son was known in his youth. Not until after the old man's death, and when he wished to efface all trace of his connection, did he announce himself as Marchmont!

This, at first sight, looks like weakness and vanity, and one would have been inclined to declare that such a fantastic piece of coxcombry would never lead to a substantial result; but it depends, like everything else in this world, on the qualifying circumstances that govern it.

John March with the fine names, was the son of a jockey and horse-trainer at Doncaster, who was well known to all frequenters of the turf. He was an honest man for his calling, and his judgment in horseflesh, and

skill in training and breaking-in, were incontestable. He was a shrewd man, who had made his own way in the world, and very proud of the position he had achieved.

He had been found, one bitterly cold gusty night in the month of March, lying, rolled up in an old patch-work counterpane, at the stable-door of a large inn-yard in Doncaster, by the ostler, when he went to give his final inspection before going to his loft for the night. He was a stout, healthy, strapping baby ; but, except the counterpane, perfectly naked : not a scrap of anything that could trace his identity. It certainly was just possible that he might have been the purloined son of a marquis, or even the heir-apparent of a dukedom, shamefully mislaid by his nurse ; but the probabilities were greatly in favour of the supposition that he had been dropped by some gipsy or wandering beggar who had been hanging about at the fair which was just over. Be it as it may, the ostler took him up, and carried him into the house. No stroke of good fortune, however, befel him, for he was sent to the workhouse without delay, where he was knocked and cuffed about, and had every facility for dying which could be offered to a baby belonging to nobody ; but he thrived in spite of obstacles. He had been christened John, and March being the month when he was found, it was adopted to distinguish him from all the other Johns in the place.

The ostler who had picked him up at the stable-door went, out of curiosity, to see what had become of him. Moved by some impulse which he did not even attempt to account for, he carried the lad home with him to his loft, and declared he would keep him, and make a man of him.

“Jack March” lived in the stables, crawling in and out amongst the horses’ legs, without an idea of being afraid, and sharing their good graces along with two favourite stable cats.

Even at that age he was made handy, and grew up a sharp active lad. He had no notion of anything but

horses : he loved them with all his heart, and could always be trusted to do his duty by them. He was a good lad, too, as lads go, and silent as one of his own horses. He was always grateful and affectionate to his old friend, the ostler, listening to him with deference even after he had gone to live as groom at Sir James Bulkeley's, who had a fine place in the neighbourhood. It was a proud day for him when he was promoted to a striped black and yellow jacket to ride for a sweepstake, which he won. The old ostler, who was a bystander, then declared, that "he should now shut his eyes in peace," which he did shortly afterwards, leaving all his savings and many good counsels to his *protégé*. But with the career of John March we have no further concern than to say briefly, that he went on and prospered as jockey, trainer, horse-breaker. He made a good deal of money for his station ; took a small inn, and married a respectable young woman, who brought him several children, only one of whom lived ; he christened him John, after himself ; set him on horseback before he could walk, and had no other idea than that he would succeed him in his business when he should follow his old friend, the ostler.

Such was the real pedigree of Mr. Marchmont, and the auspices under which he began the world. John Phillip had, however, higher notions and aspirations latent within his soul. He was, to all appearance, quite content with his position ; but the practical republicanism of the turf, which brought him into contact with noblemen and gentlemen, had excited within him a warm admiration and reverence for what his father was accustomed to designate as the "real quality." Even as a child he had speculated upon what it was that made the distinction between himself and them—the distinction that no familiarity on their side could obliterate, and he longed to become a "real gentleman."

In his heart he always held himself aloof from companions of his own rank. This kept him out of vulgar dissipation ; for though he would have felt no

scruple to play at cards or to get drunk in company with a lord, he would have done neither with a fellow jockey, nor with any of the guests in his father's kitchen. His father was a foundling, and it might certainly have happened that some nobleman or gentleman had filled a place amongst his ancestors ; for, as a matter-of-fact, a beggar must have had as many antecedents as a lord, only they are not so well ascertained. However this might be, Mr. Marchmont early evinced a remarkable reverence for birth and family, and as much as possible, he fashioned his manners and conversation upon the distinguished models with whom the course of business brought him acquainted. When he was about sixteen, an accident befel him which gave a definite shape to his vague aspirations, and a settled purpose to his life. He was a bold and skilful rider, as indeed he could scarcely fail to be, and was in all respects a first-rate jockey. On the occasion of a grand steeple-chase, the Marquis of Todmorden had engaged him to ride his horse. It was a very severe affair ; the country was rough and broken, and there were some desperate leaps ; the ground had become a perfect swamp in some places through heavy rain ; and the brook, which was the final difficulty, was much swollen, and the banks soft and broken. Young March rode gallantly ; he was ahead of the rest, but his horse was nearly done for. He fairly lifted him over the last few steps, and it staggered up to the goal amid the applause of all the spectators at this feat of jockeyship, and fell down dead, rolling over his rider, who, when taken up, appeared to be nearly as lifeless as his horse. Upon examination, it was found that his head had escaped injury ; and a broken thigh, a dislocated shoulder, with some supplementary bruises, were the sum of his injuries. There was no doubt of his ultimate recovery, but his removal home was quite impossible. He was, therefore, carried to the nearest house, which chanced to belong to one of the gentlemen connected with the race, and there he remained for the space of three months, having nothing to complain of on the score of care and attendance. This accident was the turning-point in his life. Ignatius

Loyola, under similar circumstances, read a life of the Virgin Mary, and founded the order of the Jesuits on the inspiration of it. John Marchmont in his tedious convalescence, got hold of a topographical history of the county, which contained a history of the chief families, and a description of their family seats. A book of heraldry also fell in his way, describing not only the "coat armours" of the nobility and gentry, but also giving some account of their family history. The ambition that, unconsciously to himself, had been smouldering in his bosom, broke out into an active flame. His deep reverence for old families and high birth took another shape. Some of these noble families had risen from small beginnings, and he determined that he too would found a family, become a landed proprietor, and leave children, who should take root and establish themselves as a "country family." The view from his bed-room window extended over the park, and as he lay there day after day, his purpose became more fixed, and his plans more definite and matured. He determined to break off all his present connections, and to throw himself into an entirely different line of life. It was no boyish fancy; a strong iron will had been developed in him which never faltered. To GET MONEY he saw must be the first step towards realising his intentions. When at length he was able to return home, he wondered how he had ever existed amongst such environments. His own father, a plain, hard-featured, unpretending man, with that peculiar cast of countenance which those who live much amongst horses invariably acquire, looked to him like a groom or a serving-man, whose society he must henceforth drop!

John Marchmont's qualifications for the career he contemplated were a strong and a hard intellect, an ambition which inspired him with an intense desire to rise in the world, and the most unscrupulous indifference as to ways and means. He had strong common sense, but no feelings, nor even passions; he was starting in the career of life with all the advantages which a man, entirely destitute of the very rudiments of a conscience,

can possess over those who are restrained by moral scruples. These amiable qualifications would, in all likelihood, have led to his transportation, had he continued in his original condition. The ambition to become a "landed gentleman," turned them into another channel, and kept them within the bounds of civilized allowance.

Old John March, who was quite innocent of suspecting the angel sentiments that were lurking in the heart of his dear son, welcomed him home with delight. He was proud of the feat that had nearly cost him his life, and expanded into conversation for nearly the first time since he could talk.

His son quietly announced his intention of becoming a lawyer, and of never entering the stable-yard again!

The father looked at him for a moment, prepared to refuse; but what he read in his son's face altered his purpose.

"I know that look," he said; "you have an eye like a vicious horse. When a horse looks so at you, there is nothing but to shoot it, before it is the death of you or another. You are not a horse, but a Christian; go your ways and be a lawyer. You are ashamed of your father. I know—I know—go your ways."

Young Marchmont was articled to a solicitor at a neighbouring town. He gave himself resolutely to study with an industry that in itself was admirable. He had lost his mother when he was seven years old, and his father died soon after the term of his articles expired. The property he left was good as a stepping-stone to getting more; but it was a mere nothing compared with what he had fixed in his own mind as the amount to be aimed at. It whetted his appetite, and gave him a foretaste of the power and pleasure of money. He bought a partnership with a solicitor in good practice in London, married his daughter, and eventually succeeded to the business, and to his residence in Russell Square. He had now acquired a certain position of respectability and standing, but far short and indeed of quite a different

kind to what he had determined to obtain. His appearance and manners were those of a gentleman; he had acquired a good deal of general cultivation; he kept steadily in view the position which he intended to assume; and he neglected nothing that he considered would be becoming to it.

And now having at length the command of money, the character of his business gradually changed. He removed from the office where he and his late partner had carried on their affairs, and took the old house where Charles Herbert found him. He began to deal in such bargains as a man with money can always drive with those who want it. He bought legacies, reversionary interests, deferred annuities; he lent money, he discounted bills, but all in a clear, straightforward way. No one—not even those who fell into his hands—could accuse him of taking undue advantage of them; he would need his name hereafter, and was careful not to sully it. He had a quiet reputation of being an honourable, business-like man in his dealings. No one knew the extent of his connections, nor the transactions in which he engaged; he was as silent as his own father about some things. Those who were necessitated to realise some valuable though not immediately available resource, always found themselves, through some indirect and unsuspected channel, made aware of the fact that Mr. Marchmont would buy whatever they had to sell. He was stern as death, and inexorable as destiny; but he did not play any small game of worrying chicanery. Those who came to him knew the worst they had to expect at once, and this it was that made his reputation for quasi-liberality and straightforward dealing.

By the time he was forty he had obtained money enough to buy an estate, or anything else he wished for, that money could buy; but money was only the means to an end—he desired to be a “landed squire;” but it was chiefly for the sake of being recognised as a country gentleman, and received amongst them as one of them—this was the most difficult part of his scheme.

In those days, men who had made their own fortune were not so plentiful as they have become since, and in all times the country gentry have kept their ranks closed against "upstarts."

When Charles Herbert came to him, he conceived the plan of making him the means of realising his scheme. Charles Herbert was in every respect suited to be the instrument in the hands of a man of determined purpose. On their journey down he intimated his desire to be presented by Charles as his friend—if questions were asked, as a barrister of family in Yorkshire. Charles, who did not actually know anything to the contrary, readily agreed—with what success has already appeared; but Mr. Marchmont had conquered too many obstacles to be baffled now.

He saw the Chauntry lands, and understood all that might be made of them: he saw the neighbourhood, and took the measure of those who composed it; and he decided that it should be through *that* estate he would achieve the secret object of all the labour and vanity deferred of so many years. He resolved that in that place he would found a family which should be mentioned in the next history of the county of Essex which should be written! Hence the tenor of his bargain with Charles Herbert.

Stripped of all its disguises, and brought into the light of day, this may sound a very poor and pitiful conclusion for a man to recognise as the object of his life, and of all the labours he had done under the sun; but he is neither the first nor the last who will weary themselves for "vanity."

The small social success of his first visit did not deter him. He came down regularly along with Charles; his dislike to conviviality disappeared, and that had been the great stumbling-block. In his hands Charles Herbert was a passive instrument, and he worked his position in the county to his own advantage. He gradually became looked upon with less dislike; and finally, if not absolutely popular, he became tolerated in the society where he

desired to take root and flourish for the rest of his life.

Things went on apparently as usual at the Chauntry for the space of two years; but Margaret had an instinct, that much was going on with Charles of which she knew nothing, and that his affairs were not by any means in a thriving condition.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONSTANCE was now twelve years old, very little, and childish-looking for her age, but as pretty and elegant as a fairy. Her light golden hair hung in bright glossy curls round her head ; they were in general sadly tangled, and hung much as it pleased chance to let them, for they never for five minutes together, maintained the appearance of being trained by brush or comb. She had lovely dark-grey eyes, like her aunt's, with long curling lashes much darker than her hair. Her complexion was of the old-fashioned wild rose tint, not often seen now ; her forehead and neck were delicately fair, but her hands and arms were sun-burnt with working in the garden and despising gloves. There was a bright, glad intelligence in her face, which made it lovely : as old Nanny said one day, "Eh, but Miss Constance has the look of an angel—when she is not vexed !" This qualifying clause was, we are sorry to confess, quite called for. Miss Constance, with a very affectionate disposition, had a passionate, impetuous temper, showing itself in violent gusts of passion, which, although they passed away quickly, quite transformed her appearance whilst they lasted ; and they could never be calculated upon, as the most casual circumstance was sufficient to arouse them. The highly nervous temperament which she inherited from her mother, was doubtless the cause of this ; and to do the

child justice, she was always dreadfully sorry for these outbreaks, and made most earnest resolutions to rule her spirit better for the future.

She was very susceptible of external influences. A change of weather—an east wind—a gloomy day—told upon her like a barometer, and made a steady temper more difficult to her than to most children.

The strange insight into all that was passing, and her power of sympathy with the feelings of others, which she had shown as a young child, had become clearer and stronger.

She was affectionate, and endowed with a passionate sensibility; but it was crossed by a vein of hardness—almost of cruelty. In fact, it seemed as if one portion of her nature was inspired, whilst the remainder had been left either barren or fallow, as it might hereafter prove.

It was the same with her intellect. She could comprehend and take pleasure in reading what, to other girls, would have been an unknown tongue; whilst, in other matters, she was of the most pure and simple stupidity. She would devour history, and realize to herself the scenes and persons with an intense vividness that looked like genius; but all the efforts of her aunt and the parish clerk to teach her to write, had proved unavailing. She was still writing copies of straight strokes; and spelling continued the impenetrable mystery it had been in the beginning.

Rare mental endowments were combined with strange limitations, and anyone watching her would have said, that nature had been in doubt whether to make her a genius or an idiot. That which turned the scale, however, was not strength of intellect, but the singular truthfulness and transparency of her nature. She had the instinct of uprightness within her, and was fearlessly straightforward in all she said or did. Had she been cleverer she would have been cunning; it was the stupidity of not knowing what else to do better, that made her true; and that which, under one aspect, was an imperious temper, made her words the exact utterance

of her feelings. With a great deal that was engaging and lovable about her, she was as difficult and trying a child to bring up as could well be found; and under a less judicious guidance than her aunt's, she would have been inevitably warped and spoiled.

Towards her aunt she had a passionate attachment, amounting to worship; for old Nanny, too, she had a great affection; but as all the companions she had known, were the little boys and girls of the farmer on the other side of the house, who were rough and stupid, and did not care either for Plutarch's "Lives" or the "Universal History," and who would not play at Cleopatra and the asp, nor the death of Socrates—only at making baby-houses, or going to London and dressing in worked muslin aprons!—it gave Constance a great contempt for children of her own age. She liked to ride to the fields in the hay-cart in summer, and to go nutting, and to gather blackberries when it was the season; to work in the garden, to watch the bees, and to climb up into the shady branches of a tree; to read about her beloved Egyptians and Assyrians; but she had an undisguised contempt for the young people whom she was obliged to admit as her playfellows.

Children of superior intelligence who are thrown a great deal with grown-up people, easily cherish an amount of misanthropic contempt for those of their own age, which would be highly amusing if it were not rather a grave indication.

Margaret Herbert had long wished to find some companions more suitable for her charge, but in vain. The neighbouring gentry lived on their estates: the nearest family was five miles off; most of them were old family people, whose sons and daughters had married and gone out into the world, or else they were the sons returned from their travels, recently married, and the rising generation were either in their cradles or their pinafores, and there were no young people of the age of Constance to be her companions and playfellows.

She never went beyond the Chauntry garden or the drive in the pony-chaise; sometimes she had a gallop on

the pony round the field, without bridle or saddle. But her aunt thought her grown too old for such freaks, and on her last birthday had given her a side-saddle, a riding-skirt and hat, and she was allowed to ride about the lanes, within a certain range from home—and this had been a great acquisition. On the rare occasions when her aunt went to pay a morning visit to Morton Chase or Brentwood Park, or any of the other highly-respectable residences where their country neighbours held their state, Constance always accompanied her, and had been, ever since she could remember, duly admired, and petted, and stuffed with good things at luncheon; but that was not a desirable kind of visiting, so it was well these excursions came seldom. Margaret was beginning to feel anxious over the increased waywardness and uncertain temper of her charge, to wish she could have some change of scene, some companion, and, above all, better instruction than she herself could bestow. Her childhood was breaking up, and Constance was standing on the threshold of youth, full of glial impulses and exuberant life; and yet, at other times overcome with strange fits of dreamy sadness and discontent for which she could give no reason. Old Nanny declared that "Miss Constance was growing so cross there was no doing anything with her, though after all it was no wonder, it was such a lonely life she led for a young thing like her;" whilst Margaret looked anxiously at her precious charge, studying with all her intellect, and heart, and memory, to divine the best method of guiding this passionate and impressionable nature.

It was March; the days had grown to a pleasant length, and a gentle mist-like green began to clothe the dark outline of the trees and hedges. Margaret's sunny garden was rich in jewelled crocuses, yellow, purple, and white, and all the early spring flowers. In the lull of the cold east winds, the sun shone out with the inexpressible freshness and luxury of spring. Constance and her aunt were walking in the garden at noon, a gentle rain had softened the air, and the buds seemed to grow visibly before their eyes; the rest of the garden was rather soft

and splashy, but the fine yellow gravel of the Nun's broad walk was clean and hard as marble.

"Oh, aunt, aunt, what a heavenly day!" cried Constance; "these kind of days make me always wish to be something quite different to what I am,—something better. I cannot explain the feeling; but do not you know what it is to feel strangely, half glad, half sorry, when spring first comes in? I always wonder where the birds come from, and what they have been doing all the winter; it seems as if they would speak to me, if I only knew their language, but you see they speak in thoughts. There is another thing, too, which spring days make me always think of, and wish for,—new clothes; is not that curious?"

"I suppose it is from seeing

"The fresh earth in new leaves drest,"

that you feel tempted to follow her example."

"But do *you* never feel the same, aunt? You never have any fresh clothes—they are always black."

"It is certainly some few years since I felt tempted to vie with the flowers in gay colours," said Margaret, smiling; "but it is quite natural in you, and you shall choose your own colours for yourself this spring; so think what you would like to have."

"That is too good to be wished for all at once; I must keep it to think about. But there is one thing I should like,—a pretty brown dress, the colour of Mrs. Lacy's, trimmed with green, and a little white silk mantle, with a hood, to go to church in."

"Well, I will write to London for some patterns of silk and muslin, and you shall have whatever you like best. But see! there is old Simon Jones, and he seems to have a letter for us; suppose you run and fetch it."

Constance returned, dancing along, and holding a letter above her head.

"From papa, I know by the seal! Is he coming to see us?"

Margaret glanced through the letter; it was as follows:—

"DEAR AUNT,

"I purpose coming down to the Chauntry some day next week (most probably Tuesday, or it may be Monday). Mr. Marchmont is coming with me, and will bring his son, who is home from Eton. Please have beds ready for us. The Brentwood hounds meet three days next week, if the weather holds. There is stabling for a squadron at the Chauntry, and Lacy can accommodate the grooms, so do not put yourself out of the way on our account; anything you have in the house will be quite good enough. With love to Constance,

"I am, dear aunt,

"Yours affectionately,

"CHARLES HERBERT."

Such a real man's letter! "Some day next week; Tuesday, or it may be Monday." "Do not put yourself out of the way on our account!" as if two fine London gentlemen, an Eton school-boy, two grooms, and horses accordingly, could drop down at the front door of a quiet elderly lady, living in seclusion, and far removed from town or market, and require hospitality at a moment's notice, without causing about as much pleasant disturbance as a discharge of fireworks, or the descent of a balloon upon her flower-beds!

Margaret was, however, far too dignified to give utterance to her annoyance, and there was, besides, no time to lose in making even the wisest of observations. Monday was the day named as most likely to bring them, and this was already Saturday at noon.

She returned to the house with a somewhat quickened step to take counsel with old Nanny, and to dispatch a messenger on horseback to bespeak provisions.

Constance was, of course, in ecstasy, and by her zealous attempts at assisting, sorely tried the patience of old Nanny, who by no means shared in the young lady's delight at the prospect of so much company.

When all household matters had at length been put in train, Margaret had leisure to recur to that portion of the letter which caused her the real misgiving of heart

with which she contemplated this visit. "Mr. Marchmont is coming with me, and will bring his son, who is home from Eton."

Margaret sat in her high-backed chair in the dusk of evening, watching the logs as they blazed and hissed upon the hearth, foreboding evil with a depression of spirits she could not shake off, and which was all the more oppressive for being vague.

She did not like Mr. Marchmont, as we have before said, and she had an undefined dread of his influence over her nephew, whose indolent passivity (unless opposed at the wrong moment) she well knew. And this son—what could be the motive of bringing him here? It might be accidental, but Margaret had an instinct that Mr. Marchmont did nothing without a motive that did not lie upon the surface.

She had often wished that Constance had some companion. "Ah!" said she to herself, "people should be careful what they wish for—destiny seems to grant their wishes in irony. One does not know, one cannot know, what influence our blind wishes may exercise in that invisible world which surrounds us, but of which we know nothing."

Constance burst into the room, followed by a young kitten. The kitten sprang upon the letter, which the old lady had dropped, and began to play with it.

Constance, apostrophising the kitten as her "nice pussy" "good pussy," "small pussy," caught it up from the floor, and, placing it upon her aunt's shoulder, tried to entice it to pull off her cap!

"I really do not know which is the silliest, you or the kitten," said Margaret, as she put the creature on the floor. "You may come and repeat some poetry to me, until Nanny brings candles." Constance had a great delight in committing to memory any poetry that took her fancy, and repeating it to her aunt was one of her greatest pleasures.

"What shall I say for you, aunt?"

"Whatever you like best, my dear; I shall be glad to hear it."

"Well, then, I have learned a poem you have not heard me say yet. I learned it because you admired it one day," and she repeated those quaint lines by Dr. Watts, beginning,—

"I am not concerned to know
What to-morrow Fate will do,
'Tis enough if I may say—
'I've possessed myself to-day.'"

"Thank you, my dear; it is a great favourite of mine."

"I do not like it one quarter so well as some of the old ballads. Nanny knows an immense number, though you would never suspect it; and she told me one the other day about a lady who left her husband and children to go away with her old lover as she thought, but who was an evil spirit sent to tempt her. She left her children, though 'her tears fell down like rain.'

"Farewell, farewell, my ain sweet babes,
I shall never see ye again.'
She hath set her foot on the goodly ship,
Among the mariners bold;
The sails, they were of the rustling silk,
The masts, of the beaten gold.

"They had not sailed a league, a league,
A league, but barely three,
When dark, dark flashed his ruddy cheek,
And dark, dark glanced his e'es.
The sails that were of the rustling silk,
Fill'd not with the freshening breeze.

"The masts that were of the beaten gold,
No shadow cast on the seas;
The mariners vanished from the deck,
The wind came on with a sweep;
The lady spied the foot of the Fiend,
And loud, loud she 'gan weep."

I forget the next verse; but he mocks her, and they go sailing on till they come to a mountain—

"And what dark mountain is that," said she,
'Sae dreary wic frost and snow?'
'Oh, that is the mountain of Hell, Ladye,
Where you and I will go.'
Wi' that, as she gave a sob and a shriek,
Aye taller he seemed to grow—

“Until the top of the tallest mast
 Nae taller seemed than he,
 He strake the topmast wi’ his hand,
 The foremost wi’ his knee,
 And brake that gallant ship in twain,
 And sunk her in the sea !”

The voice of Constance had a wild, frightened cadence, as she uttered the last lines. “Is it not dreadful, aunt, and are you not sorry for the poor lady ?” said she, after a pause.

“Dreadful ! yes,” replied her aunt, who seemed strangely moved by the ballad ; “but remember always, that sin is worse than sorrow. No sorrow will burn you but that which is brought down by your own sin ; never forget that, child. The lady could but have died if she had stood by her duty. She found death, and despair too, in fleeing away from it. Constance, when you grow up, never let any suffering tempt you to leave what you know to be right, what you know to be a duty given you to do. Let no hope of being happy yourself, or making anyone else happy, tempt you to do the least thing that is not *right*. Your whole after-life will not redeem one wilful transgression, and there is no misery like sin.”

Margaret spoke in a hard, stern voice. She grasped the hand of Constance with an unconscious strength, until the child shrunk with pain. She seemed to speak under the influence of some deep conviction, the source of which lay buried in the past. Constance looked up in her face with awe, and said, in a low voice,—

“But *you* were not that lady, aunt ?”

“Not that lady, no ; but the truth of her is the truth of all who do likewise.”

Then followed a long silence, and when old Nanny brought in candles, Margaret was leaning back in her chair, deadly pale, and her features contracted, as with sharp pain.

“Oh ! Nanny, look at Aunt Margaret. What is the matter ?” said Constance, terrified.

“Go to bed, Miss Constance, and I will see to your aunt—you can do no good. They are spasms, which

have taken her at times ever since she was in Italy. She will not like to see you there when she comes to herself."

"But she will die!" said the child, passionately.

Margaret opened her eyes for a moment, and, seeing Constance, smiled faintly. "I shall be better soon; leave me to Nanny."

Constance obeyed; but the idea that her aunt might die came upon her for the first time, and in an agony of grief, she prayed that she might die also.

CHAPTER XIV

THE next morning was Sunday. Constance awoke with the sense of some dreadful evil hanging over her. In a moment she recollected **her** aunt's illness, and reproaching herself with having slept throughout the night, she sprang out of bed to inquire from old Nanny; but the house was buried in deep stillness—nothing to be heard except the twitter of birds and the sleepy cawing of the rooks, who had not left their nests: it was not fully light. As she listened, the door of her aunt's room opened, and old Nanny came softly out, bearing a tray of empty basins and cups in her hands. She looked weary and harassed. Constance ran to her, startling the old woman until the tray nearly fell from her hands.

"Mercy! Miss Constance! is that you, going about the house, barefooted, at this time of the morning? What are you doing here?"

"Oh! Nanny, Nanny! how is my aunt?"

"She is asleep now. I have been up with her all night. She is quite better, and when you see her, do not ask her any questions; she does not like to be asked about these attacks. Do not mention it to your father when he comes. Now go back to bed, like a good girl. You will catch your death of cold, and that will be a pretty piece of business."

"But she *is* better? What may I do for her?" said Constance, clinging to her arm.

"I tell you she is well again. Go to bed now ; she would be put about if she knew you were standing on this cold floor with nothing on but your night-dress. And worry is the very worst thing in the world for her. You must be a very good girl ; that is all you can do for her, Miss Constance. She loves you better than anything else in the world."

Constance crept back to her own room, scarcely able to rejoice in her aunt's safety from the glimpse of the horrible possibility there had been of losing her altogether—an idea that had never occurred to her until now. This was the first deep emotion that had been stirred in Constance ; it was the grain of sand in the fairy tale that had fallen into the lake, and broken its calm surface.

When Constance saw her aunt, she was somewhat reassured to observe no change in her appearance, unless it were that she looked paler than usual. Constance behaved with a tact worthy of a grown person, and made not the least reference to the evening before. Margaret declined to go to church, and negatived the wish of Constance to remain with her. Formerly Constance would have objected, but now she quietly and gravely put on her bonnet and went alone. Her real childhood ended on that day.

Monday the visitors were expected. They could not possibly arrive before afternoon ; but the day on which any great event is to happen, is generally useless for purposes of ordinary employment, no matter how many spare hours there may be before it comes to pass. Constance could settle to nothing. The time passed slowly enough till four o'clock, and then, just when she had ceased to hope for them, the clatter of horses' feet was heard, and the barking of the farmer's great dog. Margaret Herbert, in her usual dress and best lace cap, went to the porch to welcome her nephew ; and Constance, half clinging to her and half eager to run out to her papa, stood by her side. She felt rather daunted at the sight of the visitors with him.

"Well, aunt, you see I am come down with an army at my back, this time," said Charles Herbert, saluting the

old lady with an affectionateness which procured instant forgiveness for his thoughtlessness. "And my little Constance, she is quite grown up into a young lady. I scarcely knew her again—it is six months since I saw her."

He lifted her in his arms, however, as if she had been still a little child, and placed her upon the horse from which he had just dismounted, as he had done before times without number, that she might ride to the stables. On this occasion, however, Constance did not exactly approve of the proceeding. She was, for one thing, in all the consciousness of a best worked-muslin dress, and new black-kid slippers with silver clasps, and bound with blue to match her sash ; and she did not like to be lifted upon a great horse before Mr. Marchmont and his son and their strange groom. With a little air of pettish conceit she begged to be set down again.

During this proceeding, Mr. Marchmont had been performing his respects to Margaret, presenting to her his son, and expressing all manner of polite hopes and fears as to her being put to any inconvenience by their unceremonious inroad.

Phillip Marchmont was a tall, bright, manly-looking boy of sixteen ; there was a certain fearless independence in his appearance which just stopped short of audacity. He wore a species of military foraging cap, which Constance greatly admired ; and she was much struck by the air with which he threw his reins to the groom as he dismounted ; but when Mr. Marchmont, calling her his little princess, desired his son to shake hands with her, Constance drew shyly back, and then felt extremely vexed when he turned away to go to the stables. A plentiful dinner of country fare, made dainty by the tasteful rustic fashion in which it was served, admirably in keeping with the place, was soon upon the table.

The gentlemen, hungry with their long ride, found it wonderful. Constance and Margaret were the only persons dissatisfied. Constance felt extremely displeased that Phillip Marchmont paid no sort of attention to her, and seemed to take interest only in the conversation of her

father and Mr. Marchmont, joining eagerly in all that was said about the prospect of good sport, fine runs, &c., showing off all his knowledge of the technicalities of the stable and kennel with a pedantry that would have raised a smile anywhere else; but it was his first time of following the hounds, and it is no wonder that it should seem the most glorious prospect in life. In spite of her pique, poor Constance was constrained to admire more and more the dashing, eager, high-spirited youth who was so unconscious of her presence.

Margaret's dissatisfaction arose from seeing the change the last few years had wrought in her nephew. The half shy, half lazy, tranquil *gaucherie* of his manner in old times, had given place to a certain air of fashion; the muscles of his face were flaccid, and the lines strongly marked, giving the impression of dissipation rather than of ill-health; an air of weary recklessness, as of a man who had let himself go, and who dreaded only to be alone, lest he should hear the voice of some great sorrow, or it might be some remorse imprisoned within his breast, and which he sought to drive into darkness. He was lively, witty, and seemed to take an eager interest in trifles. He entered into the hunting prospects with as much zeal as Phillip Marchmont himself; but the face, with its wan, weary, reckless look was visible through all.

Before the cloth was well removed, the groom and stable-boy, with two fine hunters, rode into the yard.

"Jem Sykes and the horses, at last!" cried young Marchmont, with enthusiasm, pushing back his chair.

"We sent them on by easy stages the day before we left town," said Charles Herbert to his aunt, by way of explanation. "Do not disturb yourself, I beg, either about the horses or the men. I have quartered them on Lacy, at the next door, and it is all right. It is quite enough if you take us in, without laying any other burden upon you. With your leave, we will go and see how they have fared on their journey down."

Mr. Marchmont bowed to Margaret, and both followed Phillip, who, upon the first appearance of a move, had

left the room. Margaret and Constance were left to watch Nanny finish placing the wine-glasses and the modest dessert upon the table.

"Oh, aunt, let us go into the parlour and be quiet," said Constance, disdainfully. "I wish papa would not bring company; it upsets all one's comfort!"

Margaret laughed. "I thought you were very anxious for the arrival of this company, Constance?"

"Well, I do not enjoy it at all; pray let us go away before they return."

When the gentlemen came in to coffee, Constance, who was reading by the fire, did not even look up from her book.

"What is my princess reading so intently?" said Mr. Marchmont, bringing his coffee over to where Constance was sitting. "Chapman's 'Homer.' Oh, ho! here, Phillip, come and tell us whether you think Chapman as good as Pope."

"I know nothing about translations, Sir," replied the youth, somewhat contemptuously; "no translation can give any idea of the original."

"When people cannot read Greek, they feel much obliged to the great men who have condescended to make translations," said Constance.

"Yes; I suppose they were written for the use of women—ladies, I mean."

"There is nothing in life so conceited as a clever school-boy," said his father, with a smile of apology to Margaret Herbert.

"It is a happy season," said Margaret, good-naturedly. "I have often wished that I could be a boy at a public school, to be taught as they are taught."

"Girls could never learn what we do," replied the youth, in a decided tone. "No girl could learn even what the boys on the lowest form have to do; they could never stand caning without crying out, and no boy cares for that."

"I have always thought," said Margaret, without taking any notice of this speech, "that it would be an excellent thing if girls had, as far as practicable, the

education of boys ; everything is diluted and prepared for the use of women, even facts. So much fuss is made about their learning the most trifling branches of common knowledge, that they learn nothing naturally or thoroughly ; they are not taught to aim at the severe exactness demanded from men in their studies, and I think any rational being has reason to regret when the faculties and qualities which God has given him are not called out to the utmost ; when anything *less* than the *best* of which he is capable is accepted from him, either in matters of morality or intellect."

"But, my dear madam, you would have women much less charming, if you entailed upon them the headaches of severe study. They were not made to carry the heavy metal of scientific information ; they would be much too formidable."

"My dear Sir," said Margaret, whilst her eyes lighted with her subtle smile, "I have no wish to entail either headache or science on women who have no vocation that way. I only protest that they shall not have 'learning made easy ;' that what they acquire shall be learned thoroughly, and without the flattering stimulus of a superficial facility. A great deal of patient labour produces very moderate results, and I do not see any danger of women becoming more 'formidable' than the generality of men."

"Girls may learn Greek as much as they like," interposed Master Phillip ; "nobody wants to hinder them, only they never could learn it so as to stand one of our examinations at school ; so they may as well not try ; they are content with translations, which after all are better than any they could make for themselves."

"Aunt was thinking of many other things besides Greek," interposed Constance, who had been listening attentively to all that had been said, and whose flushed cheek and scornful glances evinced her extreme dislike of Master Phillip's manners and doctrines ; "and besides, if it is so grand a thing to be able even to *read* Homer, what must it have been to write his poems ?"

"I suppose you think the 'Odyssey' and the 'Iliad'

are straightforward poems, written just in the order you read them—by one man, whose name was Homer?" said Phillip, scornfully.

"And were they not?" asked Constance, eagerly.

"Of course not," replied Phillip, with an air of capability.

"My dear Phillip, spare us a display of school-boy erudition!" interrupted his father. "When scholarship is not ripe, it is intolerably barren and pedantic. Ten years hence you will, I hope, be a less clever fellow than you are now; meanwhile, I had brought down a book for my friend, Miss Constance, but I fear she is growing clever, too, and will despise it."

"Oh, no! that I am sure I shall not," said Constance.

"It does not look very inviting on the outside, but it is an account of some of the old English romances: 'King Arthur,' 'Sir Launcelot du Lac,' with the other Knights of the Round Table—'Sir Isumbras,' 'Sir Bevis of Hamptoun,' and many other worthies besides. I found this copy in an old book-shop, which must excuse its complexion. I had the clasps renewed. I have not forgotten how you used to torment me for stories, and I thought I had now found a store that would last you some time."

"And I have not forgotten how good you were in telling me tales when I was a little girl," said Constance; "and I am as fond of hearing them now as I was then. But this is charming! it looks like a book of magic, with its black cover and brazen clasps. Oh, aunt! is not this a treasure?"

"I think we have both of us reason to be equally obliged to Mr. Marchmont," said Margaret, looking at the book through her eye-glass. "My taste goes with Constance in the matter of loving old stories. I should have been a great encourager of the minstrels and troubadours had I lived in those days."

"You would have inspired them as well as encouraged them," said Mr. Marchmont, gallantly; "we have lost many songs by having your presence with us now instead of having lived then."

Margaret received the compliment like one accustomed to hear things far more flattering ; and giving a signal to Constance, she rose and prepared to take her departure. Charles Herbert, who since tea-time had been dozing over his newspaper, roused himself, to beg that his aunt would not disturb herself on the morrow, as they should ride over to breakfast at Willingham, where they would also dine, and stay all night, and that she must make no preparation for them until she saw them again.

Margaret was not at all sorry to hear this, but Constance felt a pang of disappointment. She had expected a great deal of attention, and still more amusement, from the visit of Master Phillip and his papa, and was extremely disgusted to find herself made of no account at all. She bestowed a disdainful "Good night" upon the young gentleman, on whom it fell harmless, but which greatly amused Mr. Marchmont and her father.

"Come, Marchmont, some brandy-and-water, and a game of *écarté*, before we go to bed," said Charles Herbert, reviving into animation.

"With all my heart," rejoined the other, and they sat down to play.

Phillip, after watching the game, and turning over the despised pages of "Chapman" for half-an-hour, betook himself to rest, and to dream of the glories of the coming hunt. Fortunately for his self-complacency, the walls at the Chauntry were thick and solid, otherwise he might have heard a comment not soothing to his vanity.

"Oh, aunt ! did you ever see so rude and conceited a boy as that Phillip Marchmont ?" said Constance, as soon as she had concluded the reading of her nightly chapter in the Bible to her aunt. "I suppose he considers that putting down other people will raise his own importance. He is just the most ill-mannered, disagreeable person I ever saw."

"Well, my dear, we are not responsible for his manners," replied her aunt. "He is going away early to-morrow morning, and after this visit, it is highly probable you will never be offended by seeing him again ; so console yourself with that reflection."

But, singularly enough, the reflection did *not* console Constance ; on the contrary, it gave her a strange feeling of pain and annoyance. The mainspring of her woman's nature had been touched that night ; unconsciously to herself was roused the desire to make some impression on the rude youth whom she had denounced, and to force upon him some consciousness of her existence. She formed plans of how she would behave when she met him again, until she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XV.

CHARLES HERBERT and Mr. Marchmont were sitting over a fresh log that had been placed upon the fire in the parlour, after their return, late in the evening, from Mr. Willingale's hunting dinner. Master Phillip had gone up at once to bed, tired with a hard day's sport, and not so sober as he had been before breakfast. Charles Herbert was black and gloomy—a sure sign with him that he had been drinking more than usual. Mr. Marchmont looked calm and cold, as he always did, and employed himself in building up the fire into a bright blaze; the reflection of the flame gave a mocking, sardonic expression to the smile with which he addressed Charles,—

“I say, Herbert, I have a plan in my head.”

“I have not the least doubt of it,” replied Charles, with a slightly contemptuous movement of his shoulders; “at whose expense this time?”

“It is a plan by which you will be benefited as much as anyone else.”

“Let me hear it, then, for I never needed good luck more; but I always doubt anything that comes from you. It is the devil's luck, and never stays with one; it only comes to take away what one had already.”

“Bah! you are hipped to-night; it is easy to see you have been drinking. My scheme is this. Instead of leading a racketing bachelor's life in lodgings, you shall

take a house, and have your aunt and my pretty Constance to live with you. Constance will be a lovely creature in a year or two hence; she ought to be well educated, and not kept down here, seeing nothing but sheep and green trees. When she is up in London, you can either engage a governess or get masters for her."

"What good will that do *you*?"

"None, that I know of; it is only an incidental advantage which I wish you to perceive."

"And what then?"

"And then your aunt will be at the head of your establishment, and we shall be able to see some society. You will represent this to your aunt, and induce her to agree to your proposal."

"Well?"

"You now know my plan."

"But it does not suit me at all; my plans are exactly the reverse. So far from returning to London, I intend to remain here for awhile. I have had a run of ill luck, which has dipped me considerably, and I shall stay down here and worship fortune till the star changes. I have met with a very rare old book on the calculation of chances, which confirms me in a notion I have long had. I shall work it out in my solitude, and not come up to town again until I am pretty sure of being able to break the bank whenever I put out my play. It is only for the sake of Constance. If I can only win enough to leave her an estate like the one I have lost, I will be content never to touch a card again. I am sick of play, but it is my only chance of saving Constance from the work-house when I am gone. The next run of luck I have you shall invest it for her, before it has time to fly away again."

"Decidedly what a wise man would do, if a wise man ever played at all. But that need not hinder my scheme. On the contrary, you will play at more advantage in your own house; the chances there would be at least more equal."

"You talk as if I had the money to do it with."

"As it is my plan, I shall find that. The house will

stand in your name : to your aunt, to Constance, and to all the world, it is you who are the master. I shall regulate the expenses and live with you : it will be my son's home when he is in town. I wish to have society round me ; and with such a woman as your aunt at the head of the table, I shall not find it difficult."

"But she knows no one in London ; my companions would not do for her."

"I have overcome greater difficulties than that. As Constance grows up, it will be advisable to introduce her. As you will certainly have no fortune to leave her, it becomes of so much the more importance that you should at least win enough to supply her wedding-clothes. You must marry her early."

"If you wish for a quarrel," said Charles, springing fiercely from his seat, "come on, and let us see which can insult the other most, and then a brace of pistols may settle it. What right have you to sit there and taunt me with the poverty to which you have reduced me, speculating upon the destiny of my child, which, God knows, would have been hard enough if even you had not cast your black shadow over it ? If I could only win enough to make Constance independent, I would blow out my own brains the next moment. You insult me by talking of her marriage. Who is there that would marry into a doomed family like ours ? By Heaven, it would drive a sane man mad to see you sitting there, with your cold, sneering face, and pretending to talk like a friend !"

Mr. Marchmont did not reply, but fixed his hard unchanging eyes upon Charles : his smile revealed his white sinister-looking teeth. Charles tried to continue in the same fierce tone ; but he stopped, and, with an impatient gesture, sat down again, glaring at the fire a look of defiance.

"I do not think it would suit either of us to quarrel ; and I really do not see why you should wish it. In what respect is my proposal distasteful to you ?"

Mr. Marchmont spoke in a cold metallic tone that contrasted strangely with the almost hysterical vehemence.

mence of his companion. Charles Herbert was, unless strongly excited, indolently quiet in his temper; but Mr. Marchmont had the power to exasperate him beyond all bounds.

"Come," continued he, "let me hear in what way I have proved myself your enemy."

"Do you call it nothing to see lands which have belonged to us for generations, thriving in your hands as they never did in ours? and to see it all going to enrich you, whilst I have a bare pittance?"

"My good fellow, do not distress yourself about that. Money makes money; and if the estate thrives with me, it is because I have brought money to it, and you have all the credit of it. You only did what, in the pass you had come to, you could not help. How will you ever redeem your fortune if you lament your strokes of ill luck so weakly? Come, men are not quarrelsome in this way unless they are in low water; study your secret for ruling the chances, and I will let you have a couple of hundred to try it. You will repay me out of what it wins."

Charles Herbert's eyes brightened: "Well, now, that *looks* like being a man's friend; but you are so deep that I cannot believe anything *is* what it seems with you. But I will risk whatever lies underneath; for hang me if just now I know where to turn for a guinea. As to the scheme, that is infallible. You had better go shares with me; you will perhaps bring in some of your own luck."

"Thank you—no; I will only risk the repayment of my money. I shall see after the house as soon as possible, and in the meanwhile you will inform your aunt and Miss Constance of the change that is at hand for them."

"If I did but know what that scheme of his covers," soliloquised Charles, as he extinguished his bed-candle, "I should think I had not done a bad day's work; but dealing with him is like selling oneself to the devil—pay day is sure to come at last."

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. MARCHMONT and his son departed the next morning immediately after breakfast. The young man paid his parting respects very politely to Margaret. Constance drew back, and seemed busy with her bird-cage. Either Master Phillip did not think her worth following, or else he interpreted her action as a sign that she took no part in the farewells that were going on; he caught sight, too, at that moment, of his horse coming round. Nodding a good-humoured but careless "Good-bye, little girl," he ran hastily through the porch, and began to pat his horse, examine its legs, and entered into an animated conversation with the groom as to whether it had taken any harm from a sharp stone which it had taken up in its shoe the night before; forgetting the existence of Constance as completely as if she had been one of the sparrows upon the house-top.

Mr. Marchmont made no such breach in his attentions. He took leave of her with paternal gallantry, and entreated Margaret to bring her up to London, and give her a fortnight's sight seeing, and enliven his dull place in Russell Square with their presence. Constance scarcely heard him; she had upset her bird-seed, and was scraping it up from under the table, but Margaret promised to think of it.

After their departure things went on stupidly enough.

Charles studied his book on chances, and made abstruse calculations. Constance was cross and listless; whilst Margaret was more thoughtful than usual. In fact, she was debating in her own mind about taking an important step, the consequences of which were likely to be lasting in their influence, and a mistake might be as serious as snapping a pistol, not knowing it to be loaded. She was debating whether the proper time was come when it would be right to tell Constance the history of her mother; whether to allow her to grow up with a few more years of light-hearted freedom, or to tell her what must cast a shadow over her life before she was fully aware of all the wretchedness it comprised, and allow her to grow accustomed to the knowledge whilst her ignorance would disguise its terrible significance. Know it she inevitably must, sooner or later, as well as the sad inheritance it entailed upon her. Leprosy, insanity, and an evil name, have, from the beginning, fallen upon the children, in their consequences far more heavily than upon the parents who entailed them: it is the stern predestination of cause and effect which no prayer and no pity can avert. Nature is blind and deaf, and terrible in the execution of her penalties.

Margaret would gladly have died, if so she might have redeemed Constance from the penalty of a lot brought on by no fault of her own, but as this was vain, her only hope was to induce her to accept nobly her position.

Margaret shrunk from the task, and would fain have found excuses to defer the evil day; but an accident precipitated her into the midst of things before she was aware.

They were taking their afternoon walk under the lime-trees a few days after Mr. Marchmont's departure.

"I wish papa would go away," said Constance, "we are much happier without him. He studies that great book all day, and we must neither move nor speak for fear of disturbing him. He does not care for us, and he makes me miserable. I am sure he is unhappy, or has done something dreadfully wrong."

"Your papa has had a great deal to make him unhappy."

"Well, what is it? But it is not that sort of unhappiness. He looks like someone expecting to be found out, and hanged for something he has done; and I lie awake at night wondering what it is."

"Do you love your papa, Constance?"

"No, I don't think I do, much. When he is away in London, and has not been here for a long time, I begin to think I love him and would like to see him again; but when he comes, I am always glad when he goes away again, because he hinders us, and we have no comfort whilst he is here, and I am always frightened if I am alone with him."

"Perhaps you would be sorry for him instead, if you knew all."

"Well then, tell me, and I will try."

It was a moment not to be lost. Margaret saw her way, partly, at least. She sat down, and made Constance sit down beside her, and told her the story of her father; how much he had loved her mother, and how he had been separated from her, and how they had met each other again. She told her about Miss Wilmot, for that was a trait of generosity that Constance could well understand. She told her of her mother's insanity; and how she, her aunt, had come to take charge of the poor little baby, and how she had brought her up to that day. "And now, Constance, do you not think that your father has enough to make him sorrowful?"

"Ah, indeed, yes!" said Constance; "and I have been very cruel to him; and, perhaps, he has been thinking of Miss Wilmot, and been sorry for her, when I have fancied he had done something wrong. Oh, aunt, I am so sorry for him! I would do anything to comfort him. What can I do?"

"You may do much hereafter; at present, if you feel kindly to him, it is something done."

"But, tell me, aunt, is my mamma still alive?"

"Yes, my child."

"And may I see her? Oh, I should be so fond of her! Would she know me, do you think?"

"No; recollect she never saw you."

"But may I never see her?"

"Some time, perhaps; not at present. Remember all she would wish you to be to your father if she were here and could understand what we say. Now let us go home."

Constance walked in silence beside her aunt. She had made the first step into the shadow that lay across her life. Arrived at home, she went up to her own room and wept bitterly, with a confused sense of grief, and fear, and pity: but, underlying all that, there was a dull sense of pain, that Phillip Marchmont had gone away without speaking to her.

From that day, however, a change came over her feeling for her father. Fancying that she now knew the secret of what had perplexed her, she became infinitely sorry for him. She did not love him as children love their parents, but as one whom she must comfort and be kind to by every means in her power. She had to make up to him for what her mother would have been.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN due time a letter came to Charles from Mr. Marchmont, to say that he had refurnished and fitted-up afresh his house in Russell Square, and that the sooner he announced his plans to his aunt the better.

Of course, there remained but one thing for Charles to do, which was to obey. He had by this time grown rather weary of his sojourn in the country, and impatient to make the trial of his infallible combination for breaking the bank, and he did not feel by any means so averse to the scheme as he had done at first. The real objection was, that he would be under the surveillance of Mr. Marchmont; but his health and spirits were now much stronger than they had been, and he felt more able to cope with him and assert himself. His only fear now was that his aunt would make some objection, and it was with a certain degree of trepidation that he proposed to her to spend part of every year in London, for the sake of giving Constance her education.

"I think it a very good plan, and one that I would have proposed myself if I had thought you would have liked the expense. I have often felt sorry to think of you in your lonely bachelor lodgings."

"As to the expense, I ought to tell you that Marchmont wishes to join us. He is very anxious to have an establishment where he may receive his friends, and have a home for his son. He has no relations of any

kind. I never saw a fellow so completely alone in the world."

"Mr. Marchmont! will he, then, live with us?" said Margaret, gravely.

"Yes; I cannot gainsay him, and I really do not see the objection. He admires you very much, and it would be doing him a favour to let him bring his grand friends to a house where you would receive them; it would give him a standing and a consideration which he cannot get for himself, with all his money; and, to tell the truth, aunt, I should like, for many reasons, to be able to lay him under some sort of an obligation."

"What sort of people would he bring about the house? and do you wish Constance to be thrown into an intimacy with his son?"

"Oh! as to that, Marchmont is only too anxious to obtain good society to bring anybody to whom you could object—he stands rather in awe of you; and, as to Phillip, he is a nice lad enough. He will be going to College soon, so that you will not have much of his company. Constance must see young men some time, unless you intend her to go into a convent."

"Well, of course there will always be the Chantry for us to fall back upon, in case I deem it advisable. You must trust to my discretion, and promise that I shall be free to come and go as I think it right. I have no intention of being at the mercy of Mr. Marchmont's convenience in any way. He is a man I dislike and mistrust, and I am sorry to see you so much engaged to him."

"Well, you see, aunt, I may as well tell you, he and I are partners, in a manner. I cannot say that I like him or trust him, any more than you do; but the deed is done, we are bound to each other. He has the most money and the most power; he is a vindictive man where he takes offence, and I am thankful that he likes you and Constance as much as he can care for anything, except his son."

"But, my dear Charles, you must not live in bondage to Mr. Marchmont, or anyone else. My property is, as

you know, all sunk in an annuity ; but I would make any sacrifice to assist you, if you wish to be set free."

"No, no ; do not talk of it, do not think of it. Neither you nor anyone else can assist me ; what I have done has been my own act and deed. Ask me no questions, I cannot bear them ; and never take notice of anything I do. I must *drive* my destiny. As to Marchmont, he can take no more advantage of me than I give him. Do the best you can for Constance—I make her over to you—never mind me. I was born under an evil star, and I must live and die under it."

Charles spoke quietly and gloomily ; but as Margaret knew that he had a great tendency to rhetoric, and rather enjoyed thinking himself doomed to misfortune, she did not attach all the importance to his words that she might otherwise have done. She thought the plan a good one, so far as regarded Constance, and she hoped that Charles would become more domesticated and attached to his daughter than he had hitherto appeared.

Constance was highly delighted at the proposed change. How far the idea of seeing Phillip Marchmont again might have to do with it, perhaps she did not know herself.

At the beginning of March, Margaret, Constance, and Nanny removed to Russell Square. Charles Herbert came down to escort them, and Mr. Marchmont was waiting to receive them.

The house had been painted, beautified, and entirely refurnished throughout in a handsome, substantial fashion, that was in keeping with the style of the house, and with the standing that Mr. Marchmont wished to assume. No pretension, but everything in the very best style of respectability. A grave, well-trained, middle-aged man, out of livery, had been engaged to attend upon Margaret and Constance. A coachman and footman, in dark, quiet liveries, and three respectable women servants completed the establishment in-doors ; a groom and stable-boy the out-of-door department.

A dark-green family carriage, and a magnificent pair of horses, had been chosen by Mr. Marchmont himself,

who, of course, knew everything connected with horses ; indeed, horses were the only extravagance in which he was inclined to indulge ; but it was a taste displayed quietly, without needless show, and as far as possible removed from anything dashing. Charles Herbert had his own horse, and servant who did not sleep in the house. Mr. Marchmont would have no one who was not entirely under his own control.

The whole establishment had been brought to the most efficient working order and discipline before Margaret was invited to the head of it. Mr. Marchmont took it in hand as he would have done any other matter of business, and those under his orders seldom ventured to be either slack or slovenly in their department. He had made up his mind to have a complete, well-ordered establishment, and his quiet, passionless will pervaded throughout, to the minutest details. None of the domestics could have told *why* they were so much afraid of Mr. Marchmont, whose voice was never raised above a low, quiet, even key, without an inflection to indicate either anger or satisfaction, and his dark, stony, impassible eyes, which always looked full at the individual addressed, but without betraying either emotion or consciousness—but fear him they certainly did. He never manifested any human feeling before them ; it appeared as though he could not be either glad or sorry, or angry or pitiful, but they *knew* that if they failed they would be sent away to starve. They were by some means impressed with the firm belief, that no one ever displeased him in the smallest matter and prospered after it. As for deceiving him, they candidly believed that to be impossible ! In the meanwhile, so long as they were silent, and did not gossip of anything that passed in the family, and did their appointed work thoroughly, they all had excellent places and high wages.

Such was the household over which Margaret was called to preside.

The apartments prepared for herself and Constance were separated from the rest of the house by a short

passage, which was entered through a double door from the first landing at the head of the stairs. They consisted of two bed-rooms, a sitting-room, and a small room above that had been fitted up as a bed-room for Nanny. Nothing could be more comfortable or in better taste than the chintz hangings and furniture. A few choice engravings from celebrated pictures hung on the walls, a dwarf book-case occupied one side of the room. Mr. Marchmont had taken great pains to make these rooms such as he thought Margaret would like, and had been at the gallantry to procure a chair, and small table to stand beside it, with a crimson cushion and footstool, as much like her own at the Chantry as possible. The windows had been enlarged to open to the floor, and opened upon a large glazed balcony, full of choice plants. The bed-rooms, which communicated with each other, looked upon the square; but the sitting-room was towards a garden at the back of the house. Mr. Marchmont had thought of everything; he had even been at the pains to make a staircase and a communication from Nanny's room to that of her mistress. Constance was delighted, and even Margaret, too, could not help being pleased at so much consideration.

"I trust you will be comfortable, and have no cause to regret your compliance with our proposal," said Mr. Marchmont, gently, as he conducted her over the house. "My friend Charles does not much understand household details, so that the ordering of our establishment has fallen upon me. Some one person must be the head, if things are to work well. In all respects your wishes will be the rule of the house."

Margaret bowed, but made no reply; she felt instinctively that it was Mr. Marchmont's house and establishment, and that Charles Herbert was merely the cipher that gave additional weight to the first figure. She saw it, but she could not help it; she could prove nothing; she was obliged to accept the position as it was placed before her. There was the Chantry to fall back upon when desirable.

There was nothing that the most fastidious housekeeper

could object to in the arrangement of the rest of the house, and Margaret assumed her place at the dinner-table with an odd feeling of dissatisfaction at having no reasonable cause to find fault with anything she saw.

The next morning, Mr. Marchmont waited upon Margaret, who breakfasted with Constance, in her own sitting-room. He came, as he said, to consult her upon the plans for the arrangement of household matters. He told her, with an appearance of candour, a very probable and coherent story about the partnership that subsisted between himself and Charles, and spoke confidentially about the ricketing, desultory bachelor life of Charles, and the advantage of having a household circle for him to live amongst. He gave Margaret an estimate of the sum he thought desirable for their household expenses, which, he said, he had already arranged with Charles; and concluded by telling her that such a sum was lodged in the bank to her credit, and, placing a check-book before her, begged she would disburse it according to her judgment. He also presented a housekeeping book, bound in russia leather, with gold clasps and corners, in which he had entered the wages for all the servants, and the scale of expenses for every article of consumption; every probable expense was minutely calculated; he submitted it for her approval, he said, and to give her an idea of the style which it would be desirable for them to keep. Nothing could be more courteous or more business-like, and Margaret had nothing to do but to approve. House, servants, tradespeople, income, were ready organized to her hand, she had only to undertake the administration.

Mr. Marchmont felt quite convinced that Margaret both distrusted and disliked him, but he admired her, and felt great respect for the manner in which she accepted her position, and prepared to make the best of it. As regarded Constance, Margaret had really reason to feel grateful to Mr. Marchmont, if she had known it. He retained the sum he thought necessary for the education of Constance out of the yearly allowance he

paid to Charles, and gave him all the credit of having placed it at Margaret's disposal. Although Charles would never have exercised the self-denial to save a farthing for this purpose, yet, to do him justice, he gave it his sanction, and felt obliged to Mr. Marchmont for saving him the effort of doing it himself. Margaret had the absolute control of all that concerned Constance, and she recognised the full advantage of living in London half the year, as regarded her education, which now proceeded in a more systematic way than hitherto.

The household was now fairly under way, and nothing could exceed the quiet regularity and punctuality with which it worked. Margaret found the funds placed at her disposal amply sufficient to meet all the expenses; and if it had not been for the instinct that told her some mystery was in the background of all these admirable arrangements, she would have found her position extremely pleasant.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. MARCHMONT had not boasted in vain to Charles of his power to gather society to his house. He set about securing it exactly as he would have undertaken any other operation in business. In furnishing the house and mounting the establishment, he had fully made up his mind as to the exact position he intended to occupy, and every detail was in exact keeping and conformity to his idea ;—nothing fashionable, nothing dashing, no striving after high society. He worshipped well-born people, he revered good descent as he revered nothing else in the world ; but he had the gift of never being in a hurry. His son might be fashionable hereafter, and go into high society—he was educated with that view ; but for his father, substantial respectability was all he aimed at ; and, indeed, considering the way in which he had made his fortune, respectability was a great achievement.

Amongst the various persons connected with him, directly or indirectly, in the way of business, all of whom would have been ready to please him in more difficult matters than the mere inducing the ladies of their household to call upon his partner's aunt, who was come up to town for the season ; they were not likely to make a difficulty of such a trifle, and accordingly many wives received from their husbands an intimation that

they must call upon Mrs. Herbert, in Russell Square, backed by a somewhat emphatic injunction, "to be sure to pay her every attention." Those who went in sullen submission to their husband's ukase, to leave their card for Mrs. Herbert, found their own reward in so doing. A very pleasant society gathered round Margaret; and if, during the first season, she was sought under compulsion, people soon became glad to make her acquaintance on her own account. Mr. Marchmont, who knew behind the scenes of all who came, inspected her visitors' cards as rigidly as a Lord Chamberlain, and took care that she should know only those best worth knowing. At first, dinner-parties were the order of the day; and excellently appointed dinners they were, not grand or pretentious, but pleasant and well managed. When Phillip returned from college there was a ball, and evening-parties in abundance. Margaret, although she had been so long out of the world, had a talent for society, and Mr. Marchmont admired her more than ever at the head of the dinner-table, and amongst her guests in the drawing-room. She had the comfort of seeing her nephew, Charles, become more natural and composed in his general spirits. He began to take interest in Constance and her lessons, and assumed his place as the ostensible head of the establishment with apparent complacency. He was less absent and restless in his manner, and appeared much less like a man with a crime on his conscience than formerly. Constance became very fond of him, and could succeed in whiling away his fits of depression and gloom when they came upon him. At first, he had shown a disposition to have card parties and high play, but Margaret peremptorily declared she would go back to the Chantry if that were persisted in. Mr. Marchmont was on her side, and expressed his own dislike to having anything of the sort in that house. Charles shrugged his shoulders, muttered something inaudible, and yielded.

Towards the close of the season, Margaret and Constance returned to the Chantry, leaving Mr. Marchmont and Charles to follow their own plans. They came

down to shoot ; and Phillip came, bringing some of his college friends with him.

In London he had seen very little of Constance, but here in the country she was allowed to go about at full liberty. Phillip's friends were enchanted with the lovely, clever little girl, and were always noticing her and talking to her when they were in the house. This made Phillip begin to think she was worth his notice also, especially when his friend, Lord St. Michael, declared that the first thing he should do when he came of age, would be to propose to her ; for that he felt sure she would grow up to be the most beautiful creature who ever wore a coronet !

Phillip repeated this to his father, who carelessly remarked, that he thought Lord St. Michael would keep his word, as, certainly, Constance bade fare to become a celebrated beauty.

From that day, Phillip began to pay attention to Constance, and set himself to make her care for him more than for any other person. He considered her a mere child, but every visit home showed him an increase in her graceful beauty ; and from having a careless, boyish goodwill for her, he grew to care for her as much as it was in his nature to care for anything. He "said nothing to her," as the phrase is, for they lived in a comfortable, cordial, brotherly intimacy, that there was no particular inducement to break. He was quite sure that she preferred him to anyone she had seen as yet. As to Constance herself, she developed gradually from a child into a girl on the threshold of womanhood. She loved Phillip Marchmont with all the passionate entireness of her nature ; but it was with a tranquil, contented happiness. Her feelings had not been roused or stimulated into passion by jealousy or mistrust, or evil chance of any kind. She loved Phillip, and was satisfied to be near him, and never doubted that he cared for her as she did for him. Margaret, who ought to have known better, was deceived, and set at rest by the cheerful easiness of their manners to each other. She trusted that the attachment which she had feared for Constance

would settle down into friendly goodwill. She disliked Phillip's character, as he grew older, extremely; it was unnatural in so young a man. Gay, good-humoured, very good-looking, skilled in all the accomplishments young men admire, he never let himself go; his most intimate companions never heard him say an imprudent thing, or discovered him committing a folly. His companions looked up to him as a prodigy of experience and worldly knowledge; they told him their difficulties and their scrapes; he never gave them cause to regret their frankness, but he confided no secrets in return. He was never off his guard; his caution was, however, so well disguised by friendly interest and apparent sympathy, that, with the natural tendency of all human beings to egotism and love of speaking of their own concerns, this cautiousness was not detected, and his friends only thought Marchmont "a capital fellow, who would listen with no end of patience, and was not the least of a prig."

Phillip was his father's own son, and was born without any tendency to enthusiasm. His father had systematically taught him knowledge of life, and destroyed all his illusions before they had well sprung up. He showed him, in all its matter-of-fact reality, that which young men call "Life," and thereby dispersed the curiosity and restless sense of illicit adventure which is one main charm of so-called "Dissipation." Phillip had a cold barrenness of nature. With weak passions and no vices, neither had he any generous emotions nor heroic aspirations. Anyone who looked keenly at his sharply-cut, though handsome features, thin lips, and cold grey eyes, would have seen that there was no affluence of nature beneath that quiet, well-controlled surface. His chief virtue was a good temper, which, however, sprung as much from mental indifference towards other people, as from his father's early training to give no one an advantage over him. But this gave a smiling amiability of surface which redeemed him from any tinge of coxcombry or pedantry. His figure was tall and graceful; he rode remarkably well, and had an

hereditary love and knowledge of horses; his manners, too, were extremely good, with a touch of quiet reserve, which made the secret of their charm to the frank, impulsive Constance. His voice was quiet, like his father's, but it had a freer and more manly tone.

Such was the young man whom Constance exalted into a hero, in whom she invested all the treasures of her heart and imagination, before she knew that such a word as Love had any emphasis or meaning.

Time passed on with little to mark its progress. Half of each year was spent in London, and the remainder at the Chauntry, unless Mr. Marchmont, as he frequently did, proposed a journey or visit to some place of interest about the county; and his proposals were always acceded to by the rest of this curiously-allied family. Margaret went at intervals to visit the poor idiot wife of Charles Herbert, to see that she had every comfort and attention possible; but she did not take Constance to see her mother. She shrunk from doing so, and delayed it until some accident or emergency should bring on the event naturally; but the necessity of doing it some time haunted Margaret like a spectre. Every gay and joyous laugh from Constance seemed so much redeemed from the black shadow that hung over her future life; and she resolved to delay that interview to the last possible moment.

At last, Constance grew up to be a young lady, old enough to take her place in society, and receive her share of the flatteries and vanities of the world. She was seventeen. This decisive birthday, which marks an era in a woman's life, occurred whilst they were at the Chauntry, and was honoured as a family festival.

"Oh, how I wish fairies would give us birthday wishes!" exclaimed Constance, at breakfast on the morning in question.

"And what would it please your royal highness to wish for?" inquired Mr. Marchmont.

"I should so much like to go abroad, and travel all over the continent—to the Rhine, to Switzerland, to Italy—everywhere!"

"That is a somewhat wide wish. If, instead of *everywhere*, you will condescend to be content with *somewhere*, there is nothing to prevent us from visiting the Rhine next week, if nobody else has any objection."

"None in life," said Charles; "I should rather like it."

"We can be ready to start in three days," said Margaret. And so the journey was decided.

CHAPTER XIX.

THIS visit to the Continent was destined to be memorable to others besides Constance. The same day that brought Charles Herbert and his party to Baden-Baden, brought also a young Englishman, Sydney Beacham, by name, to the same place. It was his first visit abroad, also. His good genius conducted him to a different hotel, and did all that was possible to keep them apart. There was, although they knew it not, a curious link between them. Sydney Beacham had been left early an orphan to the guardianship of a rich uncle, a retired London merchant, residing at Blackheath. This uncle had a niece at the head of his establishment who had fallen into a bad state of health in consequence, it was whispered, of an unfortunate engagement in which she had been treated very dishonourably, and the match broken off in consequence. The old gentleman made no secret about the matter when he was over his wine after dinner; and his friends always knew that it was the first symptom that he was half-way through his second bottle when he began to talk of that "sneaking scoundrel, Charles Herbert;" but before his niece he was careful to avoid all mention of his name. She still retained traces of beauty; but it was the patient, mild, suffering face of a woman past middle life; for Sarah Wilmot looked many years older than she really was: her broken health

and invalid style of dress added to her age. She was beginning to recover from the severe illness which had prostrated her after Charles Herbert's 'departure, when her uncle brought her young second cousin, Sydney Beacham, to live with them. He was a boy of eleven years old, and she devoted herself to him like a mother. The cares she bestowed upon him brightened up her dreary life; and the boy was passionately fond of his "dear Aunt Sarah," as he called her. Sydney Beacham's father had been a dashing, gambling, horse-racing, fine gentleman, who, having spent a pretty fortune of his own, married, on the strength of his good looks, a young lady of City connections, and only a moderate fortune; but as she had rich brothers, he rated their fraternal affection at an unlimited outlay to endow their sister, and as magnificent legacies when they should depart this life, leaving their memory as "generous brothers" to swell the items of the other virtues placed to their credit in their epitaphs. But nothing fell out as he anticipated. The brothers did not approve of their sister's marriage, and gave her nothing; neither did they die and leave her anything. One rich uncle, certainly, died, but he left all his money to his daughter; and Mr. Beacham, deeply disgusted at the plebeian family with which he had allied himself, spent his wife's fortune, broke her heart by his infidelity and ill usage, and died in the King's Bench, bequeathing to his young son a fragment of his estate, which, as by his marriage settlement he could not sell, he had deeply mortgaged. After Mr. Beacham's death, old Mr. Wilmot came forward and took the boy—the prospect of nursing the estate and bringing it round being, if the truth must be told, a greater temptation to the old gentleman than any sentiment of affection for his dead sister and her son. He considered that his nephew came, through his father, from a race of spendthrifts; and he set himself as diligently to repair this hereditary tendency, as he considered it, as he did to restore the condition of the lad's patrimony. Miss Wilmot acted as judiciously as she could; but whilst the uncle was bent upon teaching the boy to know the value of money, it is to be feared

that the aunt indulged his taste for having plenty to spend.

He was sent to Rugby to make a man of him. His aunt pleaded hard for college; she wished to see him a clergyman: the old man would not listen to it. He insisted that the boy should enter into an old established wine-merchant's in the City, where there was the prospect of a partnership, and of his becoming both a man of business and a man of substance, as all his mother's family had been before him.

In disposition, Sydney Beacham seemed to hold in pretty equal proportions between what he inherited from his father's family and from his mother's; it would depend on the set of people amongst whom he should be thrown which side of the house would preponderate. He was a shy, quiet boy in ordinary life; but occasionally a flash of his father's reckless devilment showed itself, which threw his good aunt into sad foreboding anxiety.

He did not make the smallest objection to his uncle's proposal as to the business he should follow. He took kindly to his duties, and evinced no sort of animosity against the mysteries of book-keeping, was steady and regular in his attendance on business, and gave very promising tokens of becoming—if no malignant external influence intervened—a substantial, respectable man. The estate, too, had in great measure recovered itself under the old gentleman's judicious management.

Sydney Beacham was now twenty-two, and in another year he was to be admitted as junior partner into the concern. The old man and Miss Wilmot each revolved certain generous projects for his benefit, to be carried into effect on that occasion.

It had been arranged that Sydney should spend the year that must intervene at the house in Mayence, both in order that he might acquire the German language and also be initiated into the Rhine branch of the trade. This was a pleasant change for the young man; his aunt further obtained a two month's holiday for him, that he might previously travel and look about him. To enable him to do this to his own satisfaction, she made him a

handsome present in money, quite enough not only to cover his expenses, but a few extravagances also.

Flint and steel, gunpowder and lighted matches, might exist to all eternity in peace and safety, if no agency brought them into collision, but if it should, the result of their respective influence becomes difficult to calculate.

If Sydney Beacham had gone to Baden-Baden a month sooner, or a month later, he might have come and gone, and lived and died a prosperous man. If Charles Herbert and his party had not been in Baden-Baden at that particular time, his history would have escaped the complication which it falls to our lot to develope.

Sydney Beacham did not go to the same hotel as Charles Herbert, but the evening of his arrival he strolled out to look about him.

The band was playing upon the promenade, which was crowded with gaily-dressed people. The windows of the great gambling-house were thrown open, and its evil-visaged officials stood looking out, taking a glance of the blessed sunshine before the business of the night began. Sydney looked at them with a vague wonder. What did they think about? What were they like themselves when they were alone and away from their play? How had they grown up from innocent little babies to be such ugly, unclean, bloated types of humanity? Cleanliness is moral, not physical; every one of these men who were lounging against the open windows looked as if no amount of washing with soap and water, or fuller's earth, could make them clean.

His attention was diverted from these worthies by a group of English, walking on the other side of the way. It consisted of a majestic-looking elderly woman, a young, bright, lovely girl, and a gentleman-like middle-aged man, who, from the likeness, was evidently her father.

For a few moments Sydney stood like one amazed,—he trembled with the strange and strong emotion that took possession of him. It was pain, affright, and joy, wildly mingled together, that for the moment took away his breath. Scarcely knowing what he did, he turned round

and followed them. He had no definite intention, but he was drawn after that young English girl as steel is drawn by the magnet ; or as if he had been placed under that old cabalistic spell which compels the victims to arise and follow, "even though they should have been bound with chains of iron to prevent it." He pressed near enough to hear the fresh, pleasant tones of her childlike voice. A small bow of striped blue ribbon fell from her white dress as she crossed the street ; he sprang forward and secured it. As the wind carried it directly in the track of an advancing carriage, the wheels bruised one of his hands severely, but he scarcely felt it. He was to all intents and purposes delirious. Sydney Beacham had hitherto been a remarkably quiet, steady young man, and singularly indifferent about women, but now his father's blood was in the ascendant, and his whole nature was transformed by sudden passion. He followed the party, who were perfectly unconscious of the human volcano so near to them. He followed them until they entered the courtyard of their hotel, and he saw them disappear into the house.

It was, then, as though darkness had suddenly fallen down upon him. He remained madly looking up to the wilderness of windows and balconies over his head ; he would have scaled the walls, or set fire to the place, if he might thus have obtained another sight of her.

He remained some time, walking up and down before the building, sometimes leaning against the wall of the house opposite, but quite incapable of going away.

At length, when it was late in the evening, he saw the individual whom he had judged to be her father issue from the gates, and after standing for a moment, proceed up the street. An idea flashed through the young man's brain ; he would make acquaintance with the father. He started upon his track.

Charles Herbert—for it was he—walked along with a quick, steady pace, till he reached the gambling-house near the promenade. It was now brilliantly lighted up, and the business of the evening had begun. Charles Herbert entered, and Sydney Beacham followed him.

The table in the large saloon was surrounded by people, and one of the men whom Sydney had remarked standing at the window, was officiating as manager. He was a sallow, bloated-looking man, who had lost two upper teeth, and had received an injury to one eye which gave a singularly repulsive expression to his face; and yet, strangely enough, a certain look of *bonhomie* and good nature seemed to have been the original impress upon that face, marked as it now was by hard, impudent, sensual rapacity.

Sydney Beacham, who had never been inside one of these places before, might at another time have been attracted by the beautiful decorations, for the rooms had just been beautified, and the appearance, as he entered, was much more like a scene out of the "Arabian Nights" than the diabolical place it actually was: even Charles Herbert looked round with admiration, but Sydney Beacham saw nothing but the young girl's father. In a few moments Charles Herbert, with the air of one at home in the place, made his way to the table, where the people were making their game for *Trente et Quarante*. Sydney stood close at his side.

"I want to play," said he; "will you tell me what I must do?"

His voice trembled; he could scarcely articulate his words; he was speaking to *her* father! Charles turned round, with some surprise,—

"Are you new to these sort of places, then?"

"I never played before. I do not even know the cards," replied Sydney, trembling with agitation.

"Then why, in the devil's name, should you wish to begin? You don't know what it is you are beginning; if you are really innocent, go home and keep so, for the curiosity of the thing."

"I will play," replied the young man, with a flash in his eyes which showed that the wild beast nature in him was roused.

"With all my heart, then," rejoined Charles, coldly; "it is what I am come here for; stand where you are, and do as I tell you."

He explained in a few words the rules of the game. "I shall give you no advice," said he; "better trust to your luck; the devil always helps beginners. I feel so sure you will win, that I shall cover your stakes, whatever they are."

The game went on. Sydney Beacham, who did not know one card from another, and had not a notion of calculating, and who, indeed, did not care whether he won or lost, won all before him. At length, the banker announced that the bank would play no more that evening.

"Well, you have blundered upon luck this evening," said Charles, "but you must go home now, before your gold melts at some of the other tables. I will see you safe."

These last words were a talisman. "I will go home if you come, not else," said Sydney; "but what am I to do with all this money? it cannot be mine."

"Bring it back here with you to-morrow night, and give it a chance of its liberty. It may not stay with you so long as you expect."

The success of the young Englishman had excited much notice, and there were those standing round who were displeased at seeing him depart; scornful looks and muttered words were bestowed upon his countryman for carrying him off. Charles minded none of them, but piloted his charge safe into his hotel. The fierce excitement of the last few hours had brought on the symptoms of brain fever in Sydney Beacham.

Charles was not remarkable for any great benevolence; his habits of life had made him indifferent. But there was something in the manner in which the youth had appealed to him; his great luck, which had been shared by Charles, who had covered his play, and a certain professional interest for a young man who had so much money to lose, all combined to stimulate Charles to a degree of active kindness that looked quite paternal.

A violent hæmorrhage from the nose fortunately removed all unpleasant symptoms, and saved Sydney Beacham from what would, probably, have been a

dangerous illness. Charles remained with him until he had fallen asleep, and then, putting the money away in a secure place, he departed, leaving word that he would return early in the morning.

"Why the devil am I taking all this trouble?" mused he, as he made his way to his hotel. "What is it to me whether that fellow lives or dies? Perhaps some of that money may find its way to me, for Constance. I am in full feather myself, to-night. If that lad has any sense of gratitude, he will lose his money to nobody but me. I may keep him out of worse hands."

Charles Herbert fell asleep with a sense of repose and satisfaction he had not known for a long time.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE next morning, when Sydney Beacham awoke, it was with a sense of confusion which for some time defied all his efforts at extrication. He was sensible of a revolution within him which considerably shook his sense of identity. He was another man, and held on to his old self by a very slight tenure of memory, rather than consciousness. He touched his hands and arms to be quite certain there was something tangible remaining to him. The bruise on his hand was like the assurance of an old friend. The room was in great disorder, his clothes thrown in all directions, and traces of blood to be seen everywhere. He got out of bed and looked at himself in the glass. He was startled at the ghastly object it reflected. His foot touched something lying on the floor: it was the bow of blue ribbon he had picked up the day before. It was now all dabbled with blood: he could not throw it from him, though it caused him a shudder,—the sight of blood always had a painful effect upon him. He turned into bed again. Something hard slipped from under the pillow; on lifting it up, he found the bundle of gold and bank notes, which Charles had placed there for safety. He pushed it back again, and rang the bell violently to have the room cleared.

The *garçon* who came, announced that the gentleman had called to see him, and was down stairs.

"Beg him to wait," said Sydney, eagerly. "Say I will be with him directly."

The *garçon* brought word back that the gentleman could not stay—he was engaged to drive out with some ladies, but would call again.

Sydney was bitterly disappointed : he felt as if he had lost his hold upon the only plank that could connect him with the object of his mad idolatry. However, he was gone, and there was nothing left for Sydney but to rise, and make himself presentable in case she should cross his path during the day. At the end of an hour, Sydney Beacham, considerably restored and renovated, made his appearance in the coffee-room. There was a heavy pressure in his head and a fire in his veins, which attested to the gulf that separated him from what he had been at that same hour the day previously.

The coffee-room was not empty : there were men seated at intervals at the table, some eating their breakfasts, others reading their letters and journals, and, in a corner, were two individuals playing at dominos. They were all strangers to Sydney, who seated himself in a vacant place, as much alone as possible, and called for breakfast.

Several turned their heads to look at him, for all knew he was the young Englishman who had won so largely the night before. Sydney did not perceive the attention he excited—he had fallen into a reverie.

He was roused by a young Frenchman, small and elegant in person and appearance, who looked like one of the young men in Balzac's novels. He proposed to Sydney, after a few trifling remarks, quite sufficient, as he conceived, to begin the acquaintance, that they should stroll as far as the Castle. Sydney accepted, and they set off together. Sydney was silent and abrupt : his only idea was to catch another glimpse of the young English girl. His companion rattled on about all the topics upon which young men in general, and young Parisians in particular, talk to each other—chatter no wiser than that of young women with each other in their social moments, only taking things from another point of

view. We have heard very clever men express much curiosity to know what it is women say to each other when they are amongst themselves. It is not the folly or the wisdom of what is actually said, that excites curiosity: the point of interest is to discover what women are like when they are unreserved, and not acting either on the offensive or defensive, and are only talking of whatever comes into their head; the curiosity on the other side is to know what men really are when they are talking of their own life, and not pretending to be polite, or decorous, or agreeable, to appear to advantage towards women. Men and women live in the world very ignorant of the real life of each other, making sometimes absurd, and sometimes very fatal mistakes, which go on getting into worse complications until death swallows them into the one great mystery which surrounds all things.

They had reached the hill at the foot of the Castle when the young Frenchman exclaimed, "Look there!—what a lovely creature! Do you know her name?—she is English."

Sydney started violently. Standing upon a height above them was Constance. Her hat was thrown back, and her curls were blowing about in the breeze; the tones of her pure voice and fresh joyous laugh reached them.

"Now, that is the ideal of what a young girl ought to be, to my taste," said the young Frenchman. "A virginal purity and freshness that one dreams of, but which one is doomed to see realised only in the insipid *minauderies* of young *pensionnaires*, or the *douceureuse* manners of women who have more of the serpent than the dove in their nature; but that girl looks as if she belonged to the Golden Age, before *pensions* and society existed. I sat opposite to her, yesterday, at the *table d'hôte*."

"You did!" said Sydney, fiercely, a pang of jealousy darting through him, that made him feel it would be justifiable to pitch his companion over the steep side of the hill they were ascending.

"And why not, *mon cher*?" rejoined the other. "I shall do the same again to-day, and so may you also; we

may as well be generous rivals at this stage of the business, though no doubt we shall be irresistibly driven to cut each other's throats in the course of nature, if we are in each other's way. I am horribly jealous, *moi!*"

Sydney quickened his pace, and reached the summit precisely as Charles and his party were passing by; his heart beat so violently that he could neither move nor speak to attract Charles Herbert's notice, and as he was concealed by a fragment of the ruins and a tree, he was not perceived. The young Frenchman bounded past Sydney like a deer, and, with an easy grace, took off his hat to the ladies. Margaret, who was in advance, stumbled at a rugged part of the road, and he had the good fortune to prevent her from a fall that might have been serious. He devoted himself to assist her up the remainder of the ascent, and was rewarded with thanks, and the opportunity of explaining the different objects in the view they climbed to look at. Sydney, meanwhile, remained behind, eating his heart out with rage and jealousy. He was leaning over the wall that looked down into the dungeon between the walls, where, according to tradition, the lords of the Castle used to let down their prisoners to perish with hunger, there being no other outlet but the sky overhead. If it had depended on Sydney, the young Frenchman would have found himself at the bottom of it! However, at length he had the comfort of seeing Charles and his party begin to descend the rock, and the Frenchman was not with them. He could watch Constance in peace.

On his return to the hotel, he heard that the English gentleman had just been to call upon him again.

"You know him, then, apparently?" said the young Frenchman, surprised. "But it is incredible! You gave no sign at the Castle. Let us go to their hotel, and you shall present me to the father."

Constance, Margaret, and Charles were already seated when the two entered the *salon*. The young Frenchman secured a place nearly opposite to them; but Sydney, who would have given all he had won the night before for such a place, found himself consigned to the bottom

of the table; and being on the same side as Constance, he could not even catch a glimpse of her; he only saw her for the moment, when she rose to leave the room after dinner. When she had disappeared, he felt more courageous, and went up to Charles, expressing, with infinite sincerity, his regret at having missed seeing him in the morning.

"I came to see how you were after your adventures last night. Did you find all your money safe on waking?"

"I owe you many thanks for your kindness, but I have only a confused recollection of all that passed. Did I really win all that money?"

"Oh, yes, you won it! You had a run of good luck, such as is seldom seen. I fear the more common question is, 'Did I really *lose* so much?' But let us have a stroll, and settle what we are going to do—you have no engagement?"

"None," said Sydney, eagerly; "I only came yesterday; you are the only person I know, and I feel to look on you as a friend already."

They lighted their cigars and passed into the open air. Charles seemed meditating whether he should speak. At length, after turning down a path that led away from the town, and walking some time in silence, he said:—

"We know nothing about each other; I am even ignorant of your name; but I am going to give you a piece of advice. If last night really was your first night at a gambling-table, leave this place directly, and never touch a card, or look at a pair of dice again. You will have sharpers on your track, and, as a matter of course, lose everything you have won, and everything you have to lose. If you are once bitten with play, you will never leave off. You are a young fellow, and it is a pity to see you start headlong to the devil. There is somebody who cares for you, I daresay?"

"I cannot leave this place," said Sydney, passionately, as though his life had been threatened.

"As you please," replied Charles, shrugging his shoulders. "It is no affair of mine."

"You are not offended—you are not angry?" said Sydney, eagerly.

"Not I. You are not the first, nor will you be the last, who has refused good counsel. But I must leave you. I promised to take my ladies a drive again, this afternoon."

"Stay!" said Sydney, "I must go to that place again to-night. Will you be there?"

"Perhaps; what then?"

"Will you take me?—will you tell me what to do? and you shall not complain that I do not follow your advice."

"Well, with all my heart; if you wish to learn, you must; but you will lose all your money—make up your mind to that."

"I don't care. Will you come now? Did you not say you were going out with ——"

"With my daughter. True; but if you are bent on trying your fortune again to-night, you may as well learn your alphabet. Constance must be disappointed for once."

Sydney started; he heard her name for the first time, and repeated to himself, "Constance, Constance;" he did not feel the least scruple about being the means of disappointing her; on the contrary, he felt glad and relieved to know that she would be obliged to stop at home, and that no one would see her, and that the young Frenchman could not take off his hat to her; he was glad that even her father would not ride beside her.

To date from that afternoon, Charles and Sydney became associates; but it was the intimacy of out-of-doors. Charles lounged to Sydney's room, and smoked or played billiards or *écarté* with him. Sydney laid himself out to keep on good terms with the father of Constance; but not one step nearer was he to her at the end of ten days, than he was at the beginning. Charles Herbert was two different men; as a man of the world, he was a reckless, desperate gamester; it was by play he lived, and it was to play that he looked for the means of leaving Constance a competence to live upon after his death. Indeed, he said constantly to himself, that it was

only for her sake that he played at all. But he deceived himself. He was a gambler to the marrow of his bones, and the thought of Constance was only an additional stake that he played. Still he was very English in his notions of all that was right and desirable for women. He allowed no young men, nor men of any kind, to dangle after his daughter; he entertained as bad an opinion of men in general, as men of his stamp generally entertain of women, but his wife and his aunt had given him a reverence for all women; and his only idea of female education, was to keep them from speaking to young men. Constance was jealously watched by him; and if his engagements prevented him accompanying her abroad, she and Margaret were expected to remain indoors. He would as soon have cut off his right hand, as have introduced Sydney Beacham to her, or any other young man whom he had once seen at a gaming-table. Sydney did not know this, and flattered himself that he was gaining ground with the father, and when he had made a sufficiently favourable impression, he would make proposals to him for his daughter. He had once or twice attempted to approach the subject, but Charles had always drawn back with such an air of offended reserve, that Sydney, terrified at the symptoms, drew hastily back, and hoped for a more auspicious season. In the meantime, his mad passion consumed him, and increased in force. He knew wherever she went, and hovered upon her footsteps. Where she went he followed, generally taking care to keep out of sight. His timidity was such, that under no circumstances would he have dared to speak to her; but he had also the fear of her father before his eyes. He laid no end of cunning plans to get himself presented to her; but his courage always failed. Once, by mere accident, he met the party face to face. Charles passed him with a distant bow of recognition, which would have chilled even the audacity of an Irishman, and made not the least allusion to the circumstance when they met.

Sydney attached himself to Charles's steps. People said that Charles was keeping the young Englishman to

himself, to fleece him at his ease; but, to do Charles justice, although he had not the smallest scruple to win as much as he could, yet he exercised a certain protection over Sydney, and his experience in that sort of life insured to him that at least his ruin should be transacted according to the strictest laws of honour—amongst thieves!

In the meanwhile, Sydney cared wonderfully little whether fortune were for him or against him. The excitement of play distracted his mind for the moment from the passion that consumed him. Whilst he was playing with *her* father, he was less miserable, but an accidental glimpse of Constance consumed more life and emotion than all the alternations of fortune would have done in a month; he was no more conscious of the excitement of play than if he had drank toast-and-water. As regarded his fortune, it was tolerably equal; in all games that required skill and calculation, of course he lost to those more skilful than himself: Charles Herbert won immensely from him; but on the other hand, at all games of hazard, his luck was something remarkable. Charles Herbert, and men who had, with infinite pains, made calculations of chances and intricate plans for success, lost night after night, Sydney Beacham never failed. At the end of ten days he was, as regarded money, pretty much as when he began. But the life of intense excitement had told upon him fearfully, he looked already years older, and the whole expression of his person and countenance was wild and haggard; his hurried, irregular gait would alone have betrayed the fire that was consuming him. Any but those who were his present associates would have been touched to see the desperate recklessness of so young a man, but they only saw that he was living too fast to last long, and made the best of their time.

Charles and his party were going to Paris, where they were to be joined by Mr. Marchmont and his son. Charles carelessly said, as they parted at night, "If you come on to Paris, find me out. You must look sharp when you get there, it is a worse place than this."

Sydney felt as though his life were escaping from him. But he was at Paris before Charles, and took up his own abode at the hotel he had indicated. Mr. Marchmont and his son were already there, and had engaged rooms for their party. Sydney secured one from whence he might watch their arrival.

The very day they arrived, Sydney went to call on Charles: he was shown into the sitting-room they occupied. Margaret and Constance were there, dressed to go out. A handsome young man stood near them, with his hat and cane, evidently prepared to accompany them. An older gentleman was reading the newspaper at one of the windows. Charles was not there. The blood rushed so violently to Sydney's heart, that he grasped the door to keep himself from falling. Everyone looked surprised, but Margaret asked him to be seated, and said that Mr. Herbert would be there presently; and then, observing to her companions that they would be late for their appointment, she bowed to Sydney and passed out of the room, followed by Constance and the young man. Her scarf caught upon the back of his chair as he rose for them to pass; he endeavoured to disengage it, but his hands trembled too violently; accidentally her hand touched his. The whole was the affair of half an instant; she looked up, and acknowledged his attempt at politeness with a slight smile, and hastened after her aunt.

Mr. Marchmont—for the gentleman reading the paper was no other than he—made some trifling observation; receiving no reply, he looked up, and was sufficiently startled at the appearance of Sydney to drop his paper and come hastily forward. "Good Heaven! what is the matter? he is dying!" and sprung to the bell.

"It is over," said Sydney; "it was a sudden faintness. Tell Mr. Herbert I shall be glad to see him."

Charles Herbert and the waiter entered at the same moment. Charles looked surprised, and not altogether pleased.

"Ah! when did you come here? Shall you make any

stay? I did not expect to meet you again so soon—my friend, Mr. Marchmont.”

He seated himself, and Mr. Marchmont gave some order to the waiter. Sydney seemed afraid of betraying himself, and spoke in a polite, indifferent tone, though his face was still deadly pale, and his lips quite white. He spoke of indifferent topics, invited Charles to dine with him, when they might make some arrangement for the evening. This being a matter of business, was soon settled, and Sydney Beacham departed, without Charles Herbert having said a single word to bring him any nearer to the hope of being allowed to come again.

“Who is that young fellow?” said Mr. Marchmont, as the door closed after him.

“His name is Sydney Beacham. I met him at Baden; I don’t know much of him, except that he has been going at a pretty pace ever since I knew him. I think he is a little mad; he lives at the gaming-table, and has the most wonderful luck that ever was. It seems a sudden outbreak. These steady-going fellows, when they *do* break loose, are like devils.”

“Beacham—Beacham. I know all about him,” said Mr. Marchmont, slowly; “I knew his father; he is as like him as he can be, and is following in his steps as fast as he can. The father had a good property at one time, but he got through it all, and his wife’s money too, and died in the King’s Bench. His wife’s brother took the boy, and has nursed round his little estate in Yorkshire; the mortgage was paid off only the other day. Old Wilmot might have saved himself the trouble; *that* young man will be none the better for it; he is his father over again, only he will not last so long.”

Wilmot—the name grated upon Charles, but he asked no questions, only proposed they should go to the Louvre to meet the ladies.

Sydney Beacham was like an Indian hunting upon a trail. He followed Charles and Mr. Marchmont at a distance; he followed them till they joined Constance and her aunt and Phillip Marchmont in the great gallery at the Louvre. He did not dare to approach, but he

hovered at a distance ; he saw, as by a flash of lightning, how things really were, and a jealousy that burned like fire took its place in his heart. He rushed away, and walked he knew not whither. He was alone under some trees in a park. "I cannot live—I cannot live," he exclaimed, in a voice faint with agony. "What *have* I done to deserve this ? what have I done ?"

The paroxysm was long, and would have been fearful had anyone been there to witness it ; but it passed over, and left him for the time more composed ; it was the composure of utter exhaustion.

Charles was punctual to his appointment for dinner. Sydney was under the reaction from violent emotion, and Charles perceived nothing that might not easily be accounted for. After dinner, without any previous intention, he suddenly and almost unconsciously burst upon the subject that was in his heart. He poured forth what sounded to Charles like a stream of insanity, and passionately desired that he might try to make himself worthy of his daughter. All shyness and timidity had disappeared, it was the desperation of a man pleading for life—for more than life.

Charles replied coldly and sternly ; he was angry and annoyed.

"I am not accustomed to make my daughter the subject of conversation with strangers. I know nothing of you, except as a gambler, and were you a hundred times richer than you represent yourself, you should not enter my daughter's presence. You are a gambler, Sir, and under no circumstances shall you ever address one word to her."

A dead silence followed this outburst. The young man attempted no reply, but sat with his head bowed down upon his breast, overwhelmed by the words and the tone in which they had been spoken. Charles looked at him a few moments, and then said, in a softened voice,—

"Come, you are very young, and do not understand the bearing of things ; let us drop the subject, and think no more of it. Are you ready ? Shall we be going ?"

Sydney raised his head like one awakened from sleep. He drew his hand over his forehead, and replied in a tone that contrasted strangely with his recent vehement entreaty.

"No, Mr. Herbert, I will not go with you. I am *not* a gambler, though I have seemed like one. But I deserve that you should think as you do of me. You do not understand why I did it, and I cannot tell you now."

His head sunk down upon his arms, which leaned upon the table. Charles tapped his shoulder, and said, in what he meant to be a cheerful tone :—

"Come, come, don't be so downhearted ; if you are not bitten with gambling, so much the better for you. In that case, I should say you were wise to break away, and go home to your friends ; so good-bye, if we do not meet again. You are a little shaken just now, but you will come round—no fear of it !"

Charles Herbert left the room whistling an opera air, but he felt more sorry and uncomfortable than he could have believed possible. He tried to think that a good night's sleep was all that Sydney needed to be all right again ; but he had misgivings, which he put aside, as being no concern of his.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SYDNEY remained for some time after Charles had left him in the same posture, and so motionless, that it might have been thought he slept. He was like one who has been stunned by a heavy blow, the pain of which will follow by-and-by. At present, he was sensible of a certain relief and tranquillity, but it was the dead tranquillity of despair unruffled by a breath of hope.

At length, he arose from his seat, and summoning the waiter, discharged the bill, inquiring at the same time for the address of a notary, one who was well known in his profession.

The waiter named two, and wrote down their address ; the one whom he could recommend from personal knowledge resided in the Rue Poissonnière, and although it would be after office hours, yet, if Monsieur presented that card, he would be admitted at once.

Sydney thanked him, and passed out.

The change from the dull light of the little room where they had dined, to the broad glaring sunshine that was pouring down upon the streets, made him giddy, and he beckoned to a cabriolet that was standing near.

The Boulevard des Italiens was alive with people. Carriages were dashing about in all directions, and everybody was apparently in the height of life and

enjoyment. Sydney saw and heard everything; not with his eyes and ears, but by an internal consciousness. All the gay colours, the daylight, the noise and roar of the streets, seemed to be a dream, and he himself was the only real person moving along and looking out upon it, as from under some dark, cool shadow which sheltered him. At length the cabriolet stood still before a door which stood open. The ground-floor looked like a cavern with doors round it, and a stone staircase in the centre. On the street door—

“ANTOINE JOUBERT,
“*Notaire*,”

was written on a brass plate. He rung the bell, which sounded like a tocsin. It was answered by a young man, apparently a clerk, for he had a pen behind his ear.

He shook his head to Sydney's inquiry. M. Joubert had left business for that day; would Monsieur leave his name, and come again at ten o'clock to-morrow?

Sydney presented his talisman, and intimated that his business was urgent.

“Monsieur Joubert was at dinner with his family, and did not like to be disturbed. Nevertheless, if Monsieur would be good enough to come in, he would carry in the card, and inquire what would be possible.”

Sydney desired the cabriolet to wait, and followed the clerk into a large, dingy apartment, which apparently served as an anteroom, the desk where the clerk sat and a few chairs being the whole of the furniture; the windows, which looked as if they had never been cleaned in the memory of man, were secured with strong iron stanchions. The clerk desired Sydney to sit down, and having handed him that day's *Constitutionnel*, departed to speak to M. Joubert, who, he said, was going to the theatre.

The reactionary tranquillity of Sydney was already beginning to give way; this word, theatre, woke up all the fierce thoughts that were slumbering, and he grasped the arms of his chair to keep himself from the impulse

to rush into the street and destroy himself. The idea that Constance might at that moment be going to the theatre, and the young man whom he had seen might be with her, went through him like a knife ; but the clerk entering, he became outwardly quite calm, and followed him to a library, where Monsieur Joubert sat in a leather-covered reading chair. Heaps of papers lay upon a writing-table beside him, a time-piece of gold and bronze stood on the mantelpiece, and a mirror behind it was let into the wall. M. Joubert was a middle-aged man, with closely-cut black hair, a square, low forehead, large grey eyes, and thin, compressed lips ; every vestige of beard or whisker was closely shaved ; he had a calm, business-like manner, and when he addressed Sydney it was in a very gentle voice.

"My clerk tells me that your business is urgent."

"I beg a thousand pardons for disturbing you," said Sydney, who felt uneasy under the eyes which scrutinised him ; "I am unexpectedly called to go a long journey, and I wish to make my will before I go."

"It is past my hours of business ; I will be at your service to-morrow as early as you please. Except in cases of *extremis*, the law does not like these hurried proceedings."

"Doubtless," replied Sydney, with a peculiar smile ; "but it is indispensable that what I wish should be done at once. I must go to-night."

"You are a stranger in Paris ?"

"Yes. When I came I expected to remain some time ; but now I am called to set off upon a journey, the end of which is uncertain."

"Travelling now is so safe and speedy that no journey can be called uncertain. It was the precaution of our forefathers to make their testament before they started. Do you expect to return to Paris ?"

"I am sure I do not know," said Sydney, with difficulty repressing an inclination to burst into laughter ; "there is no knowing what I may meet with at the other end." Sydney had a fancy that M. Joubert thought him mad, or suspected his purpose. He put the strongest con-

straint upon himself to appear natural, and to avoid arousing any suspicions. "I wish," continued he, "to have such a will drawn up as cannot be disputed, and which will secure the property to the person whom I wish to possess it. I might have drawn it up myself; but in England they always find flaws in a will that a man writes himself."

"No doubt such documents often leave grounds for litigation. If you will give me the chief points you wish provided for, we can draw up a draught that will stand in case of any unfortunate casualty, and when you return it may be made out formally. Making a disposition of their property is what everyone is, socially speaking, bound to do. Perhaps you will be good enough to write down your wishes. I read English better than I speak it."

Sydney moved uneasily under the eyes that were fixed upon him. He took a pencil, and by a strong effort he wrote a few lines in steady, legible characters.

"I wish," said he, "to bequeath this estate to the person here named. I am ignorant of her residence in England; but this is her father's card, and she may be easily found. It must be settled upon her, and in case she should ever marry, it must remain hers, her husband must have nothing to do with it—make that clear. There are a few trifling remembrances I wish to leave to others. You see it will all go in a very small compass."

Sydney sat eagerly watching the pen of M. Joubert as it travelled down a sheet of foolscap.

"I will insert the names myself—French people can never spell our English names correctly."

M. Joubert handed him the pen, and Sydney wrote—
CONSTANCE HERBERT. To her was left the estate which his uncle had been bringing round with so much care. To his Aunt Sarah he left all his books and personalities; and whatever money he might be possessed of he left for her schools and poor people. To his uncle he left a diamond ring and *solitaire* which had been his father's, and an earnest entreaty that he would not attempt to set aside any of the foregoing directions.

"It only needs the signatures, now," said M. Joubert, "to be a document that will stand in any court of law in Europe."

"You are quite sure it will not be disputed?"

"It may be disputed, but not set aside," replied M. Joubert, with decision. Ringing a hand-bell that stood beside him, his clerk appeared,—

"Bring Etienne with you, and come yourself. I want you to witness a document."

In five minutes the will was duly signed and attested.

"And now, my dear Sir," said M. Joubert, when the others had withdrawn, "you may travel without a care; you have done your duty. Will you permit me to offer you refreshment? At what hour do you leave?"

Sydney started slightly; but looking at his watch, he compared it with the time-piece, and said quietly,—

"At half-past ten; that will be in an hour from this time. My preparations are all made. There remains but one thing to be done besides thanking you for the kind promptness with which you have transacted my business."

He took out his pocket-book, which was well supplied with money; for he had left the hotel expecting to play.

"I have no French money, but I suppose Bank of England notes are easily exchanged?"

He laid down two, of ten pounds each, across which he carefully wrote his name before handing them to M. Joubert. He hoped, by these minute, business-like precautions, to dissipate the scrutiny with which he felt M. Joubert's calm, impenetrable eyes were regarding him. M. Joubert examined the notes, and looked at their amount with satisfaction, though he placed them with an air of negligence upon the mantelpiece, whilst he wrote a formal acknowledgment.

"And now I will wish you *bon voyage*. Allow me to see you to the street. I shall be charmed to see you on your return. Apply to me at once if in any way I can serve you. Adieu, my dear Sir; I wish you success, and a good return."

The coachman had been slumbering on his box, and was roused by their approach.

"Drive to where you came from," cried Sydney, springing in ; and the cabriolet dashed off at a rapid pace.

"That young man thinks he has blinded me," soliloquised M. Joubert : "his *belle maîtresse* will not long be kept out of her inheritance." He shrugged his shoulders, and returned to his library.

Sydney re-entered the *café* where he had dined. The waiter who had introduced him to M. Joubert came forwards, and inquired with much susceptibility whether that gentleman had honoured his card. Sydney satisfied him on that point, and requested to be shown to a private room ; the waiter, who seemed to consider him as his especial *protégé*, was *empressé* in his civility.

"Let me have writing materials, and do not allow anyone to come near me but yourself."

Once more alone, Sydney's eyes were lighted up by a sombre joy—he had come in sight of his journey's end!

He was no longer tossed with wild, ineffectual passion :—

"Hope and Despair, the torturers, slept."

Henceforth Constance must think of him—she could not forget him. The current of his life had mingled with hers ; and he bequeathed his memory to her as well as his estate. He would not write one line to tell her all the passion that had consumed him. There were no words that he could say : he did not desire to address her now.

But there was another whom he could not leave without a word of farewell—his Aunt Sarah, who had been like a mother to him. To her he wrote :—

"DEAR AUNT,

"You will be very sorry to have this letter. If you were here I would tell you everything, but I cannot write. Things have fallen out so, that they look quite

different to what they really are. Do not let anyone make you think ill of me; you would understand everything if you were only here. Thank you, a thousand times, for all your goodness. I love you, and always have done. Give my love to my uncle, and thanks for all he has done for me. God bless you, dear aunt.

"Your affectionate

"SYDNEY BEACHAM.

"P.S.—M. Joubert, 26, Rue Poissonnière, has my will. Please let nobody set it aside.—S. B."

He folded and directed the letter, and summoning the friendly waiter, he desired him to send it at once to the post.

"And now, may I not bring monsieur some supper? Excuse me; but some refreshment is absolutely necessary. I will bring something charming, if monsieur will trust to me."

"As you will," replied Sydney. "It signifies little what you bring. Take that for yourself, with my thanks."

"But monsieur is much too generous, his amiability inspires affection. I am proud to have been of use to him."

The waiter departed, and Sydney was once more alone.

At that supreme moment, when life, emotion, memory, were all condensed into a single point, and the unknown, invisible world which was about to receive him, had come so close, that its darkness could be felt, he was sensible of nothing except of his fixed, dogged purpose, and of a dull, heavy pulsation in his head and neck, as though the veins would burst.

* * * *

When the waiter entered, bringing the supper, Sydney was lying against the couch; life was not extinct, though it was fast ebbing. The medical men who were summoned in hot haste could do nothing.

Sydney never spoke, but the haggard, corroded look he had worn of late disappeared; his face relaxed into a

tranquil, child-like expression. Once he opened his eyes, and looked round upon those who stood by with a flash of dumb, troubled earnestness, as though his "right mind" had returned to him, and he discerned all too late what it was that he had done; but the moment of consciousness was quenched in mortal faintness, and Sydney Beacham lay there—DEAD.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARGARET, Constance, Charles, Mr. Marchmont, and Phillip, were seated at a late breakfast the following morning. They had taken Constance to the opera the previous evening, for the first time in her life—an epoch never to be forgotten in the history of anybody. *Le nozze di Figaro* had been the opera, with a strong caste.

“I cannot imagine a greater pleasure than to be able to go to the opera whenever we choose! I am sure I should cry if anyone were to tell me I was never to go again,” said Constance. “As it is, I feel quite miserable to think that it is over, and that I am not going to-night. I seemed unable to take in half the delight of it, and that I needed to be two or three people at once, to be able to enjoy it all!”

“Like being at a Lord-Mayor’s feast, and finding that you can only eat an ordinary dinner, notwithstanding the load of fine things on the table before you,” said Phillip Marchmont, with mock sympathy. “Well, I hope your troubles may be always from *l’embaras de richesses*. I would rather suffer from having too much than too little. But what struck you the most? or rather, what do you recollect the best?”

“Oh, the Countess’s song, *Dove sono*. I had so long wished to hear it sung as it ought to be, as I imagined it for myself; and last night that was realized. I cannot

imagine how anyone can feel very miserable about anything, so long as they have the chance of going to the opera as often as ever they like."

"My dear Constance, your head is fairly turned," said Margaret, smiling. "I had no idea of the love of dissipation that lurked in you."

"But, aunt, love of hearing fine music is *not* to be called dissipation. If I may only have as much of that as I desire, I would be content, if it were in a coal-cellar."

"Yes, my dear, but in the meantime you will take advantage of the opera as it is."

"I wonder whether that Count Almaviva had ever really cared for the Countess. I suppose when she was a young girl, those fine clothes made an impression upon her; that hat and feathers, and that becoming cloak, must have made him fascinating; and if he sang in that voice to her, it is no wonder that she believed everything he told her. I tried to hate him, last night, but I could not. You understand, I did not admire him, only his singing kept me from feeling very vicious against him."

"You detested Almaviva, but you adored Donzelli. Is that what you mean?" said Phillip. "I daresay that you are not the only young lady in that state of mind."

"I do not adore anyone; I could not, without I knew more of them," replied Constance, drawing herself up with a half-offended air, for Phillip had hit the fact.

"Where shall we go to-night, Aunt Margaret?" said Phillip. "I should like Constance to see Mademoiselle Mars act; it would perhaps put Donzelli with his singing, and Almaviva's hat and feathers, a little out of her head. She should see what an ugly dog he looks by daylight, when he is silent. If you will give your consent, I will see whether it is her night for appearing, and inquire about places. Do say yes. It will be quite the best way of bringing her back to sobriety."

"Merciful heaven! how very dreadful!" burst from Charles Herbert, with something like a groan; "it cannot be true, or else it is not the same." He rung the bell violently.

"What's the matter?" said Mr. Marchmont, looking

up for the first time from his letters. "These sudden starts at meals are very bad for one's digestion."

"Don't speak in that Satanic way; read this. If it turns out to be true, I shall never forgive myself."

"Is this it? '*Suicide remarquable d'un jeune Anglais!*' There are scores of '*suicides remarquables*' every week."

The waiter at length came. He looked somewhat excited.

"If Mr. Beacham is in his room, No. 314, will you tell him I shall be glad if he will give himself the trouble to come to me," said Charles, speaking as deliberately as he could.

"But the young Englishman who called on monsieur yesterday is no longer here. Does not monsieur know? it is a terrible event! He killed himself last night, and the officers are already here sealing up his effects, and making official inquiries. They wish to see anyone who can throw light on his deplorable suicide."

"Did he not come in last night?"

"No, monsieur; no one saw him after he left here. The concierge says he followed you and this other gentleman when you left the hotel yesterday morning; he did not return. He killed himself last night, at half-past ten o'clock, at the '*Oiseau de Paradis*,' in the Palais Royale."

A knock was heard at the door; it was followed by the entrance of a little grave official man, who bowed courteously to the ladies, and begged a thousand pardons for deranging them.

"Take Constance with you, and go to your own room," said Charles to Margaret. "I will come presently. Do not stir out until you have seen me. And now, Sir, what is your pleasure with me?"

The new comer did not look as though his pleasure could be great under any circumstances, so dry and hard were the lines of his face. His voice was like the grinding of a coffee-mill, as he informed them that he had the honour to inquire into all they could tell him about the young Englishman, M. Sydney Beacham, whose much-to-be-regretted suicide they had seen already in the journals.

Charles sat down ; the perspiration stood in beads upon his forehead. "Is it quite ascertained that Mr. Sydney Beacham is the person ?" he asked, though his lips could scarcely form the words.

"He had his passport," replied the man of law, "and it appears that monsieur dined with him, and was the last person in his company."

Charles told as briefly as possible all he knew of the unhappy young man, suppressing, of course, the private conversation of after dinner.

"And that is absolutely all ?" asked the other. "Monsieur can throw no light, offer no suggestion, as to the cause of this deplorable catastrophe ? Such a fine young man ! There will be some who will greatly mourn for him."

Charles signified that he had no more to tell, and the man of office withdrew, after obtaining his signature to the deposition ; requesting him to be in the way in case he should be wanted again.

"For pity's sake, Marchmont, give me a glass of brandy," said Charles, when the door had closed on his departure.

"Why, Herbert, what has come over you ? You will be arrested for his murder if you show a face like that."

"And so I am his murderer as much as if I had shot him through the heart. But heaven knows I did not mean it ; that I did not know what I was doing. I could not foresee this !"

"Of course not—of course not. Nobody suspects you could. Here, drink off this, and tell me how it all came about. Phillip, my son, turn out to make inquiries, and see what particulars you can learn. You will find us here when you return."

The young man departed in obedience to his father's gesture, and the two were left alone.

"Oh, Marchmont ! I am as much that young man's murderer as if I had sent a bullet through his heart !"

"Well, so you were saying just now ; but how do you

make that out? You won his money, I suppose, and he had a run of ill-luck which he could not stand. He had not nerve enough to be a gambler; one might read that in his face."

"He was no gambler. I can believe him now, though I did not when he spoke. He turned gambler in the wild idea that it would win my favour, and obtain for him the opportunity to address Constance. He was madly in love with her, though he had never spoken to her, nor seen her, except in the street."

"And he told you that?"

"He did, and I answered him roughly enough, as you may suppose. I told him a gambler should never speak to child of mine. He seemed dreadfully cut at what I said. I felt sorry for the young fellow, and I advised him to leave off his present way of life, and go home to his friends. If I had spoken more kindly, he would not have committed this fatal act; but the fact is, I did not above half believe him."

"All this throws a light upon his sudden illness yesterday morning. You were not in the room. I thought he was going to die there and then. It must have been seeing Constance that overcame him. I really do not see in what respect you need reproach yourself; you only refused to present him to your daughter as an approved suitor, which would have been a remarkably ill-advised and imprudent proceeding. You are all right; if you must feel remorse, get it up for something else."

"Marchmont, you do not see that the root of the matter lies deeper than all that. If I had not been a gambler, that young man would have been alive now: it was my example that seduced him!"

"Oh! come, if you are going off into a metaphysical disquisition upon the concatenation of causation, I cannot follow you: I am too heavy to dance upon cobwebs; I can only look at the common sense of things. If you are a gambler it is your own affair; this young man had no sort of moral scruple about following your example; he had his father's blood in his veins. I was bred at New-

market, and I hold to the faith I learned there. With that reckless prodigal father, and a foolish, weak, head-strong mother, what else could you expect but what has occurred? Training is a great thing: this youth had been well trained; but there is no going against breeding. What has happened is just what might have been foretold. You talk of feeling sorry for him! it is enough to make a sane man mad to see such a waste of sympathy. Is it for a rational being to go and fling up his LIFE, with all its incalculable chances and possibilities, for a moment's discouragement? This young man, whose fate you take upon your own conscience, has proved himself a rash, weak, impatient fool; nothing would ever have made him otherwise. He would always have failed in an emergency; and by Heaven, Sir, a man who fails is better out of the world than in it. You have a dozen times more reason to cut your throat than he had, and yet you are not going to mend bad fortune with such a fool's remedy. I dare say his friends will be sorry about him; but he came of a bad stock, and will do more good dead than alive."

"I suppose, to do good, in your sense of the word, a man should be born without a heart, or if he *must* needs have one, it should be of steel. How can you talk in that cold-blooded style, and that poor young fellow lying dead? If you had seen his face as I saw it when I left him yesterday, it would haunt you for ever."

"I do not think so; but I will go and see if I can find out any particulars—you had best take a stroll in the fresh air to steady your nerves—bah; better men than he have died a lawful death at a moment's notice. Do not dwell upon it."

Charles, plunged in a dreamy reverie, sought the least frequented walks in the Tuilleries, which at that time of day were deserted enough. His old, morbid idea, that he was born to be fatal to everybody who came across his path, took possession of him. His own abortive life—his cowardly existence—his defeated hopes—the aspirations he once had after better things,—all rose in his memory, and weighed him down with helpless remorse

and regret. He could not tell how it was he had come to be so worthless, and he felt no hope that he should ever be anything better; he felt in a state of moral decomposition: he loathed himself, but had no vitality to counteract it.

On his return, he found Mr. Marchmont waiting for him.

"I think, Herbert, that the best thing for you to do, is to obtain a passport as speedily as possible, and cross at once to England, or else our pretty Constance will become a greater object of curiosity than either of us would find pleasant."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean that I have found out a few particulars respecting that young man. I hope your nerves are stronger than they were, or else what I have to tell may prove a shock."

"For Heaven's sake tell me at once, and don't harass one with your Satanic jesting."

"Well, if you are overcome I cannot help it."

"Before he committed 'the rash act,' as the newspapers call it, he went to a notary, and made his will in the most business-like style imaginable. Hearing that M. Joubert, Rue Poissonnière, was the notary, I went to him. He is an old ally of mine, and from him I learned that Sydney Beacham has bequeathed his estate of Royton Swale, in Yorkshire, to Constance Herbert, your daughter, to have and hold in her own right, independent of father, husband, or any other relation or connection. It is not much—about three hundred a-year or thereabouts; but it makes her independent, and, upon my soul, I am glad of it, for I like the girl as if she were my own. I said he would do more good dead than ever he did when alive, and I hope you agree with me. I ascertained something else, too, which will be rather unpleasant, but cannot be helped. Your old *fiancée*, Miss Wilmot, is his aunt; she consoled herself for your desertion by adopting this youth, and training him up in the way he should go; he has taken a wrong turning, however; that is no fault of yours, nor of mine either.

But take my advice, and lose no time in getting Constance safe to the Chantry. It will be the best place for her to receive the official communication of her heiress-ship: if she remains here twenty-four hours longer, there will be pictures of her in the print-shops, and novels about her in the newspapers."

"Sarah Wilmot! the second time her life has been made desolate by me. I wish with all my heart I had never been born. I bring evil on everyone who comes near me."

Mr. Marchmont shrugged his shoulders with impatience. "Come, come; if you are going to hold a lamentation over your destiny, wait until you are sea-sick in your berth: you may transact the two miseries at once. Do you go and settle about the passport, and I will go to the *messengeries* and secure the *coupé*."

Charles went in search of Margaret, and made her understand the need there was of their immediate departure. Margaret was painfully shocked; but there was no time for many words, as the *diligence* departed at six o'clock, and it was now near four.

It was agreed to keep Constance in ignorance for the present of what had occurred. The hurry of the preparations swallowed up all other thoughts for the moment. Constance was repaid for being snatched away from Paris and the hopes of future operas in the company of Phillip, by the despair and disappointment manifested by that young man, who only returned a few moments before they left the hotel: he had nearly missed seeing them before their departure. Constance had the benefit of all the tenderness and devotion that could be compressed into so brief a space; and the tears which had been flowing with bitter rapidity at the idea of going without wishing him farewell, were completely dried up, by the intense happiness of feeling *quite* sure for the first time, that Phillip Marchmont loved her better than any other woman in this world was loved before! She had hoped that he cared for her—she had secretly believed it; but all that hope, timid and uncertain, was now swallowed up in the delightful *certainly*, which was not darkened by a shadow of doubt.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE secret of Phillip Marchmont's sudden declaration of love and devotion, as recorded in the last chapter, is to be found in the innate vanity of the human heart. He had seen his father, and heard from him of the mad passion and suicide of poor Sydney Beacham, and instantly Constance Herbert was raised in his estimation from being a pretty girl, whom he loved in a quiet way, to be a heroine he ardently desired to appropriate to himself.

If a woman ever wishes to secure any man for a lover, let her be admired and courted by many others : it will do more to further her purpose than any amount of excellent qualities or devoted attachment on her side.

To do Philip Marchmont justice, he was not sensible of the process of vanity under which his passion had blazed out. He was a young man ; and youth has at least the virtue of believing heartily in its own delusions. Finding her on the point of departure, he really felt very much disappointed and put about by this sudden separation. The mode in which Constance received his declaration was charming ; her confusion and surprise had worked to prevent her showing the extent to which she was rejoiced. She had too strong an instinct of candour, to give a reply of any kind to a lover before her aunt had been told. At the first moment she was frightened at having so unexpectedly placed within her grasp what,

until then, had seemed too great a happiness to be expected in this world. It is everyone's first impulse to shrink back when a deep hope suddenly takes shape, and is seen to approach.

When the young man lost sight of the *diligence* that carried away Constance, he was desperately in love—more so than he could have conceived possible. He took a walk in the most sequestered alleys of the Tuilleries to calm his emotion, and to wait for an opportunity of breaking the matter to his father ; for Mr. Marchmont, whatever other faults he might have had, perfectly understood his relation towards his son, and had so conducted himself, that Philip felt him to be the best friend he had in the world. Young men might be more favourite companions ; but in any folly or trouble he went to his father as naturally as girls go to their mothers. Many a better man might have envied the perfect and unrestrained confidence that subsisted, on Phillip's side, towards his father. Mr. Marchmont was anything but a worthy man ; and although he took great pains to keep everything that was not admirable out of his son's sight, still it could not be for his virtues that Heaven had blessed him with a good son. It was the skill and tact and knowledge of human nature in general, and of his son's character in particular, that brought their own reward. All his hopes, and wishes, and affections centred in Phillip. He did not care how base, or mean, or cruel he was in his business ; he said to himself that it was to prevent Phillip ever having the need to do a dishonourable or grasping action for the sake of money ; Phillip was to be the beginning of a line of gentlemen.

That same evening, as the two were smoking a cigar in the deserted sitting-room, Phillip opened his heart to his father about his passion for Constance Herbert, and declared, that if he could not obtain her, he should certainly shoot himself.

"And so leave her for somebody else, eh ?" replied his father. "Better live, and circumvent rivals, my boy. But I did not know you were so hotly set upon this matter. How long has it been upon your mind ?"

"I do not know when I first began to care for her ; I think I must have loved her since the first moment I saw her ; but it was only to-day, when she was taken away so suddenly, that I felt and knew how much I cared for her. We had been living so comfortably together, that it required the tug of her going away, to wake me up to the danger there was that she might be going away for ever. I cannot tell you what I felt when I saw the carriage at the door, with all their things, and she on the point of getting into it ! I made use of all the time that was left to beg she would not let anybody else speak to her, nor care for anyone ; and she said she would not—so that is something gained. But, then, it might mean nothing more than that she never did encourage fellows to pay her attention. I wish I knew whether she liked me. I used, like a fool, to feel quite sure she did ; but I don't believe she does now that it comes to the point. She seems like an angel by the side of me."

"Well, my dear boy, Constance Herbert is not the girl I take her for, if she can find it in her heart to refuse you. I have watched her, and I think that if she does not care for you now, you may persuade her to do so without difficulty. Recollect, you have said nothing to her before to-day, and it was not to be expected that she should have kept her mind ready made up, waiting till you should ask her. 'Faint heart' never did any good in this world. You have my consent, my dear boy, and my best wishes. You could not have chosen anyone I would sooner see you marry. You are both young, very young ; but it is much better for a young man to marry early than late ! it keeps him out of no end of devilments, which are all plague and no profit. I have never held you in with a curb, and I am glad to find that you have sense to know that running riot through the ten commandments is not the wonderful exploit that fast young fellows are apt to think it. I have a respect for you, my boy, and you shall be crossed in nothing that I can help you to.

Mr. Marchmont seldom made speeches to his son, or demonstrations of any kind, so that Phillip was as

much gratified as surprised at this testimony to his merits.

"Well," said he, lighting his bed-candle, "you are the best father for putting a fellow into heart, and I am glad to know you are pleased with me—it gives me a good start. But you will speak to her father for me, won't you? We don't get on together, at all. He always looks as if he could eat me when I am near Constance, and I never know how to talk to him."

"Do you make you way with Constance, and leave me to deal with her father. Good night, my boy."

The father and son entered their respective rooms. Phillip thought over every word and look that he could recollect of Constance, and planned his letter to her. It seemed to him that there could never be an end of all he desired to say. He had never been in love before, and it was very pleasant. Constance certainly was the object to whom it was offered; but it was the outburst of the young man's nature: his whole being had taken fire. He loved madly and passionately. But for any distinct perception that he had of Constance, or her fine qualities and the heroic nature that was latent within her, she might as well have never existed. He loved too impetuously to see distinctly—he was too much pre-occupied with his own emotions to think much of her.

When Mr. Marchmont reached his own room he flung himself into an arm-chair. A smile of self-gratulation, that was almost candid, lit up his face: his dearest and most anxiously cherished scheme had just been crowned with success!

It had been his plan that, at a suitable time, his son should marry Constance. It suited him better that Phillip should take his place amongst the country gentry in virtue of his wife, rather than in vice of her father's imbecility, who had lost his heritage to a money-lender. Phillip's position was thus ready-made to his hands; he would become a country gentleman without any struggle or question of right.

"Certainly," said Mr. Marchmont to himself (he never took anyone else into his confidence), "with people who

know how to take advantage, nothing goes wrong! That young fool cut his throat for no other practical purpose but to teach *my* son to know his own mind. Certainly, when Jack Carew, the jockey, gave me his talisman, he gave me good luck. He told me that so long as I kept it I should never need to draw bridle for any obstacle, and it has been true. Let us see that none of those Paris rogues have picked my pocket."

He drew from an inner pocket in his waistcoat a wash-leather purse, with a curious old clasp. He opened it, and took out a small, thin gold coin, which he laid on the palm of his hand: a hole had been drilled through it to hang medalwise. It bore the effigy of Queen Anne, and had been one of the gold pieces hung round the necks of those who came for the virtue of her royal touch; it had been carefully preserved ever since, as an infallible charm and amulet against every species of evil. It was the outward and visible sign of all the religion Mr. Marchmont had in the world. If he had lost this piece of gold, all his confidence in his own skill, or judgment and good fortune, would have forsaken him. His faith in this piece of gold was the central point of his character. He believed, too, that if he spoke about it to anybody else in the world, all the virtue would go out of it. Anyone who could have stolen this would have had Mr. Marchmont and his fortune at their mercy—it was the vulnerable heel which he presented to Fate!

The next day's post carried out two letters; one from Phillip to Constance, declaring all the ardour of his affection, and making her an offer in form; the other was from Mr. Marchmont to Charles Herbert, requesting him to give his sanction to his son's addresses to Constance. Of course it was a request which, under the circumstances, it was scarcely optional to refuse. But, as it chanced, only one of these letters reached the person for whom it was destined.

Charles Herbert had no sooner arrived at the Chantry than he departed again for the Continent, that he might avoid the possibility of seeing, or holding any communi-

cation with Miss Wilmot or her uncle. He told no one whither he was going, that he might be safe from a recal.

The old postman came limping up with his letters. The heart of Constance told her what they contained, and, leaving her aunt to settle the foreign postage, she escaped to her room to read her own precious document alone.

CHAPTER XXX.

MARGARET was quite aware of the contents of these two letters, as much so as if she had read them with *clairvoyance*. The crisis against which she had so long been endeavouring to provide had come at last, and she felt herself as helpless to cope with it as though it had never been foreseen. Sadly and slowly she paced up and down the Nun's-walk, sickening in her heart at the prospect of all the suffering that she had to inflict, and which she knew herself powerless to soften of a single pang. She did not weep ; she was long past shedding tears. Her hands were firmly clenched together ; and a look of stern, sorrowful determination sat upon her countenance, though, in a groan that was rent from her very soul, she cried, " Oh, my God, that I might suffer this for her ! "

At last Constance appeared at the glass-door, looking for her. Margaret stood still as Constance approached ; her eyes were soft and lustrous, her face was flushed with emotion, and her lips were parted with a tender, unconscious smile ; her whole being seemed surrounded with an atmosphere of soft, dreamy happiness. Nothing could be more lovely than she looked as she approached her aunt. Putting her arm round her waist, and hiding her cheek upon her shoulder, she said :

" Aunt, dear ! Nanny says that tea is waiting ; and

will you read that?" sliding the letter as she spoke softly into her hand.

Margaret took the letter, feeling as if a piece of ice had been laid upon her heart. She stooped, and kissed Constance with passionate tenderness.

"I know all about it, my darling; we will talk about it to-morrow."

The evening passed almost in silence, Constance was meditating in happy dreams upon the great happiness that had come to pass for her. Margaret sat opposite in her high-backed chair, looking back into her past life, pondering upon the heavy trial that lay before her darling, and praying to God for her out of the depths of her heart.

Constance was too happy in her dream-castles to take note of her aunt's abstraction. She felt it a respite to be allowed to put off talking till to-morrow.

The next morning very early, almost as soon as it was light, Margaret knocked at the door of Constance, who sprang lightly out of bed to open it. She started on seeing her aunt looking very pale and worn, but quite dressed.

"What is the matter, dear aunt? is it late or early? Are you ill?" she asked, in the bewildered, startled manner of one suddenly aroused from sleep.

"Not ill, dearest; I am quite well. I did not intend to alarm you; but you must dress yourself as speedily as possible. I am obliged to take a journey to London, to-day, and you will have to accompany me."

"Is my father ill? has anything happened?" said Constance, anxiously. "Are we expected?"

"No my love. You have no cause for alarm; but we must go."

"But we are only just returned from there," urged Constance, proceeding with the business of dressing herself at the same time. "Must we go before ——"

"Before you have answered that letter? Yes, my child, there will be plenty of time for that when we reach our journey's end. Come down as soon as you are ready."

The heart of Constance presaged a visit from Phillip,

who might come and find them gone. This was a terrible fear for her, but her aunt looked so ill that she did not like to suggest it, as it was possible they might be going to consult a physician on some sudden emergency in her complaint, so she held her peace, and finished dressing as quickly as possible. On entering the dining-room she found breakfast prepared, and Nanny on her knees cording a trunk in one corner of the room. Her aunt's bonnet and mantle were laid out upon a chair, and everything was in evident readiness for an immediate departure.

"Now, my Constance, here is your coffee, and let me see you make a good breakfast before we set out."

Margaret spoke with a tender anxiety in her tone that, to Constance, seemed to disguise some cause of danger. She felt now convinced that her aunt was ill, and going up to London for medical advice. Acting, therefore, upon the directions she had received from Nanny upon this point, she took no notice, and ate her breakfast as calmly as she could. In a few moments a chaise came to the door, and Margaret, Constance and Nanny, took their places in it. The presence of Nanny naturally hindered any confidential conversation on the subject nearest her heart, and confirmed Constance still more in the idea that her aunt felt she might need Nanny's assistance, if one of her attacks came suddenly on. Margaret closed her eyes, and leaned back in the chaise. Nanny seemed entirely occupied in viewing the country they were passing through, and Constance had nothing to distract her musings.

When they were some ten miles from London, the chaise diverged from the highway, and entered upon a narrow, unfrequented by-road, little more than a lane; it was fortunate that they met no other vehicle, as there was not space for a cart to pass them.

The chaise stopped at length at the gate of a meadow; no house was to be seen, nor any human being. Constance inquired in some surprise, what was the matter.

"We alight here," replied Margaret. "I have a visit

to pay, and wish you to accompany me ; it is a painful one, but one that cannot be avoided. We shall not remain long."

The postillion opened the door of the chaise. Margaret and Constance alighted and pursued the path across the meadow.

"Who are we going to see, aunt?"

"A lady who has been heavily afflicted, and whom I visit from time to time."

They had now reached the end of the meadow, where the ground descended into a thickly-planted coppice ; they passed through a small wicket-gate, and in a few moments came in sight of a small, quaint-looking, old brick house, nearly covered with ivy, in the midst of a garden, which, although abounding with flowers and shrubs, and containing some splendid trees, had yet an overgrown wilderness-like appearance : the gravel-walks were rough, and the tall box-wood that composed the borders, was, in many places, dead and bare. The grass-plots had not been mown for a length of time, the grass was long, uneven, and studded with a flourishing crop of dandelions and buttercups.

Within the porch of the house-door, but so placed that the full warmth of the strong afternoon sun fell upon her, sat a woman turning a spinning-wheel. The broken thread hung listlessly from one hand, but she was twirling the wheel round with irregular speed, pleased apparently with the sound it made. She was dressed in a dark cotton gown, and a very clean, though somewhat coarse, white linen cap and apron. Although she did not look more than thirty, her hair, as much as could be seen of it, was quite white ; but her eyebrows retained their original colour, and were dark and delicately formed. Her face had a placid, vacant look of indifference and unconsciousness. She continued to turn her wheel, and took no notice of their approach.

"Well, Kate, how are you to-day?" said Margaret. "Do you know me?"

The woman neither looked up nor seemed to hear Margaret's voice.

A respectable middle-aged female, with a remarkably determined, but at the same time benevolent, countenance, came to the door, and welcomed Margaret, whom she evidently knew well, but she cast a curious and inquiring glance at Constance.

"Well, Mrs. Martin, and how has your patient been since I was last here?"

"Indeed, ma'am," replied the woman, "and I am sorry to say that I have never known her before to be so naughty and trying as she has been for the last week. I could almost think she was beginning to come to her senses and to know what she is about. She has been quite malicious in her ways, and you know she used to be as gentle as a lamb. You would scarcely believe it, but the gown she has on now is the third I have had to dress her in to-day; she has torn everything off her back twice, and I was obliged to tie her hands. She refuses her food, and I cannot keep her clean as I would like, do what I will. She is naughty, that's what she is. I can manage her no road. I am fairly worn out."

"I am very sorry to hear it," said Margaret. "Has anyone been to see her, lately?"

"Mr. Charles was here the other day. I told him about her, and he seemed very much cut up at it."

"Did she recognise him at all?"

"Oh, no! and never will. He would insist upon it that she did, but it was only some peppermint drops he held out to her; you may make her do anything for those."

"Well, I have brought some for her. Do you think she will speak to me?"

"I doubt she will not. She is in one of her obstinate ways, when she does not speak for sometimes a week together. You can try her; but this young lady had better keep out of her way, or she may tear her pretty silk mantle."

"I will go to her," said Margaret. Constance shrunk back, and did not follow.

"Don't be fearful, Miss, she won't hurt you; it is only your dress that she may catch hold of, and refuse to loose."

"How very dreadful it must be to live constantly with such a person! I am frightened now."

"Oh, it is nothing, Miss, when you are accustomed to it; and mad folks are just as much human beings as we are ourselves, and understand things in their way. I think it is quite wicked to look upon them as if they were so many wild beasts; they are God's children, though they are afflicted, and we none of us know how soon it may overtake us in the same way."

"Oh, I hope not!" said Constance, shuddering.

"This poor lady was once as pretty and sensible as you are yourself, and you see what she is come to. I have a great feeling for mad folks, and that is why I go out to take care of them."

"But do you not get frightened?"

"No. Sometimes I feel as if I were about to go mad myself, through living so much with them; but when they get violent, I don't much mind, for I know I can master any of them. Somebody must take care of mad people, you know, so it may as well be me as another."

"Do they ever recover their senses?" asked Constance.

"Sometimes. But I think they are always liable to fall back again. The poor lady here was very violent at first, but now she has become an idiot, and there is no chance for her."

At that moment Margaret returned, and said:—

"Constance, come this way a moment—no harm shall happen to you."

Constance very reluctantly followed her aunt to the porch. The idiot had left off turning her wheel, and was greedily filling her mouth with the sugar almonds and lozenges that Margaret had given her. On seeing Constance, she at first uttered a cry like that of a dog over a bone, and then stretching out her hand, she caught hold of the silk mantle Constance wore, and drawing one end of it towards her, she passed her other hand, all daubed and sticky with sugar, over the glossy silk, and held it up to her cheek, muttering, "nice! nice!" keeping the mantle grasped with a very firm clutch.

Constance, deadly pale, and sick with terror, looked imploringly at her aunt, without daring to stir, or make any attempt to extricate herself.

The attendant came quickly forward, and spoke in a firm, authoritative tone. The poor idiot loosed her hold of the silk, and cowered down in her seat over the remainder of her sweetmeats.

"Oh, aunt, do let us go away ; I am so frightened."

"Will the young lady have a glass of wine before she goes ? she looks quite daunted."

"A glass of water, please ; but do not leave us to fetch it. I am quite well now, and do not need it," said poor Constance, nervously.

"We will not remain here any longer," said Margaret. "Walk on a little, and I will follow."

She lingered behind to give some directions, and to place a handsome gratuity into the woman's hands, promising to return soon.

Constance was leaning against the garden gate, in great agitation.

"Oh, aunt!" she exclaimed, passionately, "why did you bring me here ? I cannot express to you the fear I have of idiots and insane persons. If you only knew what you have made me suffer ! And who is this person ?—and why did you bring me ?" she continued, vehemently.

"I will tell you everything, my darling ; who she is, and my reasons for exposing you to this painful trial ; but do not ask me now, we are neither of us fit to talk."

Margaret looked pale and agitated ; the overwrought excitement of Constance found vent in a nervous burst of tears. Margaret allowed her to weep in silence, and when they reached the chaise, she gave her a few drops of lavender on sugar ; but Constance continued to tremble with nervous fright during the remainder of their journey.

On their arrival in London, Margaret directed the postillion to an hotel, which put an end to the lingering, though unacknowledged, hope that Phillip might be

waiting for them in Russell Square. Neither Margaret nor Constance were inclined for dinner, although they had eaten nothing since early morning. Both of them were ill and out of spirits. Margaret lay down upon the sofa; she knew that nothing but keeping perfectly still would keep away the terrible heart pain which had been threatening all day. Constance went up stairs into the bed-room, and locking the door, indulged herself in a passionate fit of weeping, which is a young heart's protest against sorrow. It is only the young, and those unused to sorrow, who have faith in tears; to them suffering is "some strange thing," and they feel as though Fate must be moved to pity by the expression of their pain. When we are young, tears wash away much sorrow that would otherwise be hard to bear; tears only cease with us when we have no more hope. Constance wept bitterly, with little intermission, for half-an-hour, but at the end of that time she felt her heart indescribably lightened; and having bathed her face and arranged her dress, she went back to her aunt. Tea was ready upon the table; Nanny had ordered a few substantial additions, which Constance, to her own surprise, found very acceptable.

After the tea things had been removed, and they were left alone, Margaret called Constance to come and sit beside the sofa. Constance brought a footstool, and leaned her head against the sofa cushion.

"You have been crying, my Constance; what is the matter?"

"I don't know, aunt. I felt so miserable. I suppose it was seeing that poor creature at the red house, for I felt very happy till then. Why did you take me there?"

"My Constance, that 'poor creature' is your MOTHER," said Margaret, in a voice that was choked with agitation.

"Then it was cruel and abominable to take me without telling me, and I do not believe it," cried Constance, vehemently, snatching her hand away from her aunt.

"But it is indeed true, my child. I would not have taken you had there not been a cause. If, by keeping you in ignorance, I could have saved you from the reality, I would gladly have done so. If I could have taken your burden on myself, I would have been thankful; but I think you have too noble a courage to shrink from suffering that comes to you direct from your Heavenly Father, and which is not embittered by any fault of your own."

"You have said more than once that some time you would tell me about my mother, but that you wished to delay what you had to tell me as long as possible. I knew and felt there was some mystery, but I never dreamed of anything so dreadful as this. I wish it were yesterday, and that I knew nothing."

"My darling! my darling! I hid it until you should have strength to bear, and I would not have told you now had I not been obliged."

"No one ever had anything like this to bear, and I cannot—I shall die." Constance shuddered violently, and spoke in a sharp, quick voice, that sounded strangely unlike her own. Margaret trembled; she knew that the worst part of her task was to come; she put up a mental prayer for strength, and said:—

"Think of your father, Constance, and of all the sorrow he has had to bear since he was quite a young man. Your mother was a very lovely young woman; it had been a long attachment, with many obstacles, and on the first anniversary of their marriage he conveyed her to an asylum, hopelessly insane. Dare you complain when he has had to suffer thus? You say no one has had so much to suffer as you; think of the grief of the friends of that poor young man whose suicide we heard about on the day we left Paris."

"I wish I had never been born! and many others have cause to wish the same. That is all you mean, I suppose," she rejoined, sullenly.

"Would you desire to bring such an affliction upon any child of yours, or give them cause to echo the wish you have uttered?"

"Shall I go insane or become an idiot?"

"I hope and pray that it may be kept far from you. I do not fear that for *you*."

"For whom, then?"

"You may escape, I believe you will; but with that terrible malady rooted in your family on your father's side, and with this affliction to your mother, there would be no escape, humanly speaking, for any child of yours; it would be an almost certain doom. I appeal to you whether you will transmit this terrible heritage, or whether you will endure your own lot alone, to prevent another being made as wretched as you are at this moment?" Margaret spoke in a clear, solemn voice, that stirred the hearer like the note of a trumpet. Constance covered her face and cowered down upon her seat.

"I will tell you a story that made a profound impression upon me. It was in the summer of 1665 (the year of the Great Plague), that a strange and mortal sickness broke out suddenly in the village of Eyam, in the heart of the Derbyshire hills. At first no one could tell what it was; it spread rapidly, and was like nothing that had been seen before. At last it was recollected that the sickness appeared after opening a box of old clothes and woollen goods, which had been sent down from London to the tailor of the village. Then all knew that it was the Plague which had come amongst them. The people were mad with fright, and would have fled in all directions. The clergyman, whose name was Mompesson, and his wife, quite a young woman, called all the people together, and explained that they could not escape their own danger by flight, and that they would *spread* the Plague. He prevailed upon them each one to consent to stop in the village; he and his wife undertook to stay and die with them. Not one left the place; the village was almost entirely depopulated, but the Plague was stayed. The clergyman's wife was the last of its victims."

"All that was heroic. Is it true?"

"Quite so; I can find you the account, and many

details of the occurrence. You are not called upon to stand still and die like these poor people."

"That would be easy. I wish I might die; you would not hear me beg for mercy."

"We must each of us do that to which we are called; we do not choose our own work."

The daylight had long since faded, and there was no light in the room except what came from the street lamps. It was late. Neither Constance nor Margaret spoke for some time: a deep silence had fallen between them. They were interrupted by the entrance of Nanny, who came in search of her mistress. She knew what was passing, and thought the interview had lasted quite long enough. Constance hastily rose, and shading her eyes as though from the sudden glare of the candle, she went to her bed-room without saying a word.

"You had best come to bed, ma'am; if anything happens to you, what is to become of that poor young thing, so new to sorrow as she is? Ah! you know it well."

The next morning, before Margaret had rung her bell, Constance stood by her bed-side with a folded letter. She was deadly pale, and had a wild, defiant look. She gave her aunt the letter, saying, in a bitter tone, "I hope that will satisfy you."

"Yes," replied she, after reading it, "I am quite satisfied, it is all I could wish."

"Very well, then, let it go, and don't speak about it again; it will make me mad if you begin to praise me or to comfort me. There was no choice left. But I hate life, and I hate the world; it is all unjust and wretched together, and I do not believe that God made it."

She went away, leaving the letter on the bed behind her. It was a strange letter to come from a young girl, and the characters were quite different to her usual handwriting; in some places the pen had cut through the paper. It was as follows:—

"PHILLIP,

"I have heard to-day what will make it impos-

sible for me ever to marry. I have been taken to see my mother, whom I never knew and never saw before. When you wrote to me, did you know that we are all MAD? You must never speak to me again on the subject of your letter. I feel just now so different to what I ever did in my life before, that I suppose I am mad too.

"Dear Phillip, do not be unhappy. I can bear anything for myself, but it hurts me to think you should be grieved through me.

"I was very happy when your letter came, but I shall never be happy again.

"Dear Phillip, good bye.

"CONSTANCE HERBERT."

Constance did not appear at breakfast, and her aunt wisely left her alone. She had an appointment to see a physician, and some other business to transact, but she was anxious to get home. "To go home directly," were the only words that Constance spoke to her when Margaret went to her room, and home they went. Constance did not open her lips during the whole journey, and the proud defiant look did not pass away from her face.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"WELL, my dear boy, what says the gentle Constance? I am as eager as yourself for her reply," said Mr. Marchmont to his son. They were sitting together, as usual, over a late breakfast, at their hotel, and the post had just come in.

"Can you tell me what to make of all this, Sir?" said the young man, flushing to the roots of his hair, as he handed the letter to his father.

"Stuff and nonsense," said Mr. Marchmont, angrily. "That old duchess, her aunt, is at the bottom of it all. She has been trying all along to bring up the girl for a heroine, but Constance has too much human nature for her ever to succeed. She is the nicest girl I ever saw, but nothing of the heroine in her. You may see that this letter has never been written of her own free will."

"But is it true, Sir?" asked the young man. "I confess I should not like to run the risk of having a mad wife; much as I love Constance, I would not encounter this."

"Why, you are not surely going to take fright at a scarecrow? If you intend to marry into any good old family (and I should not like you to marry an upstart), you must be prepared to find insanity, or some other hereditary skeleton amongst them. Poor people have

no skeleton but poverty, generally speaking. I could make allowance for your shying at that, but mere traditional insanity is nothing. Constance herself is sane, her father is sane, though he is a great fool—he is only mad after gambling. The Herberts are a very ancient family, and some of them have undoubtedly been insane. If Constance were to marry into some old worn-out stock, I would not say what might come of it, but *we* Marchmonts are keen-witted and sound-minded enough to counterbalance any danger of that kind."

"But the mother of Constance, Mrs. Herbert, has been in a madhouse, and is insane now. I always thought there was some mystery about her."

"Bah!" replied Mr. Marchmont, with impatience; "I know all about her, her insanity is accidental. She went mad between hysterics and a tender conscience—her case goes for nothing. Constance Herbert is a very suitable match for you. She has acted honourably in telling you the worst, but there is nothing that would deter *me*, if I were a young fellow and in love."

"I shall never love any other woman," said Phillip; "any other kind of difficulty or objection would only make me more determined to have her, but I am afraid of mad people."

"Anyone would imagine that *I* was the lover, and that *you* were the prudent old father. I have given you my own opinion—you must do what your own heart dictates. I can only desire your welfare. Constance will have no lack of good offers."

Mr. Marchmont rose from table, and left what he had said to work on Phillip's mind. He was, however, extremely furious at the chance of any misgiving in his favourite scheme. In his own mind, he set down the halt that had occurred to Margaret Herbert's scarcely disguised dislike to himself.

Phillip was left with ample time to chew the cud of his own fancy; for his father remained strictly invisible, and no one about the hotel knew anything of his movements.

The young man had been terribly shocked by the

contents of the letter, and betook himself to his bedroom to meditate on what it became him to do. By degrees, a reaction began in his mind. He thought of Constance—of her graceful beauty—of her winning manners. His father's parting hint about her "receiving other offers," recurred to his mind, and the leaven of jealousy began to ferment in his heart.

He read and re-read her letter. His heart was touched when he thought of all the suffering she must have undergone the day she wrote it, when she realized the terrible doom which hung over her for the first time. He laid the blame of all that was disagreeable upon her aunt; and, finally, being worked up to a climax of impatience, he determined to go over at once to the Chauntry, to overcome the scruples of Constance, and marry her out of hand. At this point he was interrupted by the announcement that the young Vicomte de C—— was in the sitting-room, and desired to see him. Phillip swore at the interruption in a suppressed voice, scarcely above his breath, and proceeded with a smiling countenance to welcome his visitor, with whom, indeed, he had an appointment, which he had totally forgotten.

The Vicomte was a slight, elegant-looking, young man, who might have just stepped out of one of Balzac's novels, if they had then been written. He was extremely handsome, though his face had an expression of scornful weariness, which was at tragical variance with his years, for he was even younger than Phillip.

"A thousand pardons for disturbing you, *mon cher*; but I feared you had forgotten our appointment, and I came to see what was keeping you. To tell you the truth, I need your counsel: your cool English head will be invaluable."

"You know you may command me. It is as well you came here: we can talk with less chance of interruption. What is it? what can I do?"

"I will tell you whilst you dress. You will have to come with me, so we can advise while you go on with your toilet."

Phillip resigned himself with a good grace. No one

could have read in his face the extreme annoyance and contrariety he experienced at the interruption. He led the way to his dressing-room, where the Vicomte flung himself into a lounging chair, and began the exposition of his difficulties, in which a mistress, a quarrel, a complicated wager, and an impending duel, bore the chief part. He had an unlimited faith in Phillip's judgment ; and whilst Phillip heartily despised these kind of young men's perplexities, his vanity was not proof against the soothing influence of having his advice and opinion sought. He listened with interest, and entered heartily into his friend's cause. A keen man of the world, of double his years, could not have given shrewder counsel, nor seen his way with more sagacity. His self-complacency and contempt were alike masked under an appearance of *bonhomie*, which only needed a little more *abandon* to have looked genuine. The question of the wager he reserved to consult his father upon ; but the other matters he undertook to negotiate, the Vicomte being in admiration at his dexterous mode of assisting him out of what had threatened to be a very unpleasant piece of business. Phillip never for an instant felt tempted to reciprocate his companion's confidence ; he felt a complacency in hiding his own secret : it gave him a sense of superiority, quite independent of the fact that the Vicomte was not the person to whom a sensitively delicate lover would have spoken.

At length, they went out together to pursue the business in hand ; as they passed along by the carriages of brilliant-looking women and graceful equestrians, and all the elegant, distinguished-looking men who thronged round them, Phillip thought in his heart that Constance was superior to all the women he saw, and that he was very glad she was safe in a lonely country-house, where there was no one to see her ; he resolved that when she should be his wife, she should never come to Paris, nor be exposed to the gazing admiration of young men like the Vicomte, nor to any of the pomps and vanities of the world that he could secure her from. She should be all his own ; and no one else, if he could help it, should be

aware either of her beauty or her fascination ; and especially her aunt should be sent away, and have no more influence over her.

At length, their business for that day was terminated, or at any rate put in a good train, and the Vicomte insisted that Phillip should accompany him to dine with a small party of *jeunes gens* who had engaged to meet at the *Trois Frères*. Phillip knew that it was the society his father liked him to cultivate ; it was a society in which he liked to be seen, whilst he heartily despised the young men who composed it. The dinner was gay and noisy ; the *jeunes gens* talked about things that *jeunes gens* take interest in. Nothing, in appearance, could be more frank and pleasant than Phillip ; but whilst the others were indiscreet and unreserved, no amount of wine or good fellowship seduced him into saying a single word out of the overflowing of his heart. There was something marvellous in the self-control of that young man, amid all the boisterous effervescence that went on around him. At length the party rose and separated, to keep their other engagements, and Phillip returned to the hotel to seek his father.

Mr. Marchmont was sitting at a table covered with papers, apparently immersed in elaborate calculations, to judge from the array of figures upon the sheet before him. He looked up as his son entered, and, pushing them on one side, said,—

“Well, my son, you look as though you had taken a resolution ; what is it ? I am glad you are come, for I am weary of the business which has kept me all day up to this moment ; but I have thought of you.”

With the indomitable English instinct they both wheeled their chairs before the fire-place, and stretched their legs upon the hearth-rug.

“I am determined to go over and see Constance directly. I should have gone at once, only I waited to see you ; but there is still time for me to start to-night.”

“Softly, softly ; you are as much too quick now, as I thought you slow this morning. It is quite right you should go, but do not go just yet. Constance is at

present in all the glow of having done an heroic thing ; you must let that fade away and subside ; she will soon begin to weary when she finds out the reality of what she has undertaken, and that her magnanimity does not prevent her from being miserable. Absence will befriend you more, than your presence. My advice is, that you neither write nor go to her for at least a week, and then present yourself unexpectedly ; if love does not beat her magnanimity, either you do not know how to plead, or else my knowledge of human nature is at fault, and a failure would distress me as much as yourself. I tell you she is a charming girl, and you might go the world over and not meet her equal."

"You speak with unction, Sir ! You would be a formidable rival," said Phillip, with a somewhat uneasy smile.

"Pooh ! nonsense. I live over again in you. Your success is my success ; your happiness is my happiness, and I desire no other. But I have watched Constance Herbert from a child, and I can judge her rare qualities. If she were some years older and I were twenty years younger, I do not say but what I might feel tempted to enter the list for her favour on my own account ; but that is idle talking. As your wife she will be my daughter, and that will suffice for my wishes in these days."

"I may present myself before her this day week, at least, and I may, therefore, start on Saturday, three days hence."

"With all my heart ; and recollect that this three days' delay will seem to her even longer than to you, for she has nothing to distract her thoughts, whilst you have your dinners, and your rides, and your gay companions."

"They are all great bores. By the way, Sir, I have promised to obtain your advice about a wager, in which your judgment will be better than mine ; and if I am to remain here so much longer, I may as well see the Vicomte through his troubles as not. What a fool he must be to have got into such a scrape !"

Father and son then went into a disquisition upon the

point in question, but which, as it does not concern our story, we need not detail.

Poor Constance meanwhile passed her time heavily enough. She scarcely spoke to her aunt, and seemed to shrink alike from her sympathy and society. With perverse injustice, she regarded her aunt as in some way the cause of her suffering. She spent nearly the whole day pacing up and down the Lime-tree Walk. She was not only miserable but humiliated under the sense of the family misfortune; and she felt a wild, defiant hatred against Providence, and the whole world in general, as parties to having laid so heavy a burden upon her. What had she done to deserve that all her hopes of happiness should be turned into the certainty of misery, like what she was now suffering, and which must last for all the rest of her life? It seemed a cruelty too great to be borne, or to be believed; and yet, look where she would, there was no hope—none.

In her misery she thought that the family curse was come upon her, and that she was going mad. To the horror of this was added the thought, that she was separated from Phillip for ever; and that she had made him as wretched as she was herself; the remorse she felt on his account was, perhaps, the keenest pang of all her sufferings.

Every morning when she rose, it seemed to her that some change or deliverance *must* come over the dull, dead, leaden misery that weighed her down; but it passed almost as soon as the thought that roused it, and she felt as though a black thick pall fell tangibly upon her.

Margaret herself was almost more an object of sympathy than even Constance. It was her hand that had inflicted the stroke; it was she who had disclosed the wretched fact that was working all this misery, and Constance appeared to visit it upon her; for she shrunk from her aunt with repugnance, and avoided all occasion to speak to her. Margaret felt this bitterly. The only gleam of hope she had, that this deep gloom would pass over, was derived from the fact that Con-

stance, worn out with the emotion of the day, slept deeply and heavily at night. For the rest she waited patiently—the hardest task of love—and she prayed to God for both herself and Constance, that they might have strength to endure whatever was laid upon them.

It was the tenth day after Constance had dispatched her letter that she was sitting in the Lime-tree Walk under one of the trees, like one turned to stone, when a shadow fell before her. A voice said, “Constance! *my* Constance!”

She looked up, and Phillip Marchmont was at her side!

CHAPTER XXXII.

It is said that the pain of returning into life when death has been nearly reached by drowning is intense. The sudden rush of unexpected happiness upon the desolate misery of Constance was, for the moment, a sensation of physical pain. Phillip was as much agitated as herself; all he had thought or felt of a treasonable or disparaging nature came back to him like remorse. The blessed grace of youth asserted itself, and swept away all that was precocious or coxcombical. He felt humility now that he was actually in the presence of Constance: he did homage to her in his heart as his superior. For some moments they neither of them spoke again; Constance could only weep, but her head rested upon his breast, and she wept there.

"Constance! Constance!" said he, at last, kissing her head where it lay, "how *could* you write me such a letter? how could you give me up so easily?"

Constance raised her head, and looked at him.

"Easily, do you say? God grant that you may never know my misery. Phillip, I thought you would have known all I felt. I never fancied that you could mistake me."

"But, dearest, you refused me, and that did not look like loving me. I was made nearly mad myself. You refused to incur any risk for me. But that is all past now. You are mine, and I am not going to yield you for any scruple."

"But, Phillip, the reason is not done away with," said Constance, timidly, in a voice so low, it was scarcely to be heard.

"Hush!" replied he, pressing her more closely to him, as though to stifle her words. "I will hear nothing of all that; you are mine, and I will not let you go. My father says that the reason you gave is all nonsense; and if he does not accept the objection, you have no right to insist upon it. You know how wise my father is. He knows better than you about those things; so, if you persist, it can only be because you do not love me."

"Oh, Phillip, do not say that!"

For an instant a wild hope sprung up in her heart that she had indeed overstrained the obstacle, and that she might accept the dispensation thus offered from the dreadful misery which seemed to stretch like a sunless sky before her to her life's end; but it was only for a moment. She recollected her mother as she had seen her. She thought of the long life of thick darkness which had followed close upon the short happiness of her marriage; and the bitter thought flashed across her that she, Constance, her mother's daughter, was the price that had been paid,—her whole life mortgaged for those few months! The horrible injustice of the penalty entailed upon her revolted her whole soul; but it also caused a reaction from all softening emotions, and braced her up to a stern determination. She recognised the sacrifice as a necessity laid upon her. Just or unjust, she was none the less bound by it. There was no choice left for her; the matter was placed beyond either hope or doubt. At the instant this point was reached in her mind, there flashed across her, as though it were the whisper of a spirit, "And the plague was stayed."

"You do not speak, Constance," said Phillip. "Why are you so silent? Speak to me; you are not surely holding back?"

"Phillip, I would die to make you happy."

"But that would just make me more miserable than anything else in the world," said Phillip, tenderly, kiss-

ing her upon her hair and upon her eyes, as she spoke. For a moment longer Constance remained where she was, with her head upon his bosom, and his arm clasped round her; then she disengaged herself, and said, in a voice, tremulous at first, but gathering steadiness as she proceeded:—

When I said I would die to make you happy, I meant that I loved you more than life. I love you, never doubt that. I have loved you, and my heart has been filled with the thought of you ever since I first saw you. Oh! Phillip, I *must* think that you believe I love you! Tell me that you do, because it will be too dreadful if you should think that what I have to say comes from not caring for you.”

“If you consent to marry me, I shall believe you love me, not otherwise. If you are going to bring up that foolish notion again, which I have told you is all nonsense, I shall think you have some concealment from me, and that your heart is quite cold towards me.”

“Oh! Phillip, be good to me; do not you be cruel and unjust, like everything else in the world. Is it my fault that I was born? can I help what is laid upon me? do I look as though it made me very happy to tell you that I must not marry you? If I were to go mad, I should leave you as miserable as my father is, and perhaps a child to grow up like me. I should have the constant dread of such a doom upon me, and so would you. I should know that I had done a wrong thing, and the thought of that would be like poison in my life. Phillip, I must not marry you, so do not ask me again. It does not depend upon me to consent.”

“Upon whom then does it depend? upon that wise, cold aunt of yours, who hates me, and who has set you against me?” said Phillip, fiercely.

“On no person—on no one’s consent; no human being can do away with the barrier that separates us, and I dare not overstep it.”

“If I am willing to run the risk, surely you need not urge the objection. Why not say at once that you do

not love me enough to incur the chance of an uncertain danger ? ”

“ Oh ! Phillip, you do not see—you will not see,” cried Constance, passionately, “ that I should do wrong.”

“ And did you never do wrong before ? ” said he, with a sneer.

“ I will not do this,” replied Constance, standing erect. “ Torture me with your words as much as you will, they do not change the necessity that is laid upon me.”

Constance had a look of determination and despair as she said this, that frightened Phillip. He was nervously afraid of insane people, and Constance seemed to be certain that if she married him the doom would follow. She looked at this moment so different to what he had ever before seen her, that he began to think she was right, and that it would be better to take her at her word ; still the hunter’s instinct had been roused within him, and he could not let his prey escape. He felt that he must conquer her, that he must make her give up her judgment to his will.

“ Constance, I do not wish to torture you ; it is you who are needlessly torturing both yourself and me in this struggle to release yourself from my hold. You tell me that you love me ; at any rate I love you, and have put all the happiness of my life in your power. Does it surprise you that I cannot see it destroyed, through a mere fantastical piece of would-be heroism ? It lowers you in my opinion, and is quite unworthy of a generous woman, such as I believed you to be. Either your love for me is in a most stinted measure, or you are afraid to incur for yourself a risk I am quite willing to brave ”

There was that in this speech which jarred inexpressibly upon poor Constance. To be so thoroughly misunderstood—to meet with no response, no recognition, where she had so confidently relied on finding a friend to strengthen her heart against its own weakness, and give her courage to accomplish the sacrifice,—the disappointment gave her a strange pain

for which she was not prepared, and she burst into tears. Phillip did not like tears—few men do ; they are a material evidence of suffering which they cannot ignore, and they cause an emotion which is troublesome.

“For God’s sake, do not break my heart, Constance ; it is dreadful to me to see you cry. If you had any feeling for me, this need not be. Why will you devote both of us to misery ? ”

Constance had passed the point where this appeal could touch her. It fell like a blow of physical pain upon her, but she only felt how impossible it was to appeal further to him, and that she must stand her own ground as she could.

“I can say no more, Phillip ; you have heard my first word and my last. I cannot marry you. It is not I who make the separation, it is Fate, and you talk to me as if I could change it.”

She spoke with a patient despair that was very touching, but Phillip was by this time in a rage. In his secret heart he rather dreaded lest she should yield, and yet he could not endure that she should be able to hold out against his pleading. If he could have brought her within the sight of the yielding point, the probability is, that he would have allowed her to make good her retreat, and have acceded to her sacrifice ; but that she should be strong enough to make it of herself, was too bad to be borne.

“I see how it is,” said he, “you persist in sacrificing me to a piece of false heroism ; and you prefer your own pride to my happiness. Well, I hope you will never repent of what you are doing. You are driving me out into darkness, and on you be the consequences. Farewell ! ”

He dropped her hand, and was going away. Constance uttered a low, sharp cry, and stretched out her arms after him. “Phillip, Phillip, do not leave me thus. Tell me you are not angry.”

Phillip half turned round ; but the devil within him was now completely aroused. He felt hardened and

angry at the face of pale despair that met his view. "I leave you to your heroism, Madam, which will easily console you!" He waved his hand, and in another moment had disappeared. Constance sprang up like one who has been shot through the heart, and fell heavily her whole length upon the ground.

Margaret had grown uneasy at the prolonged absence of Constance, and set out to seek her, to induce her to return to the house. She found her still lying where she had fallen. She was not insensible: her breath came in dry sobbings and quick convulsive gasps, and she tossed her head from side to side. Inexpressibly alarmed, Margaret endeavoured to raise her. She partly succeeded; but the mind of Constance was wandering. She did not recognise her aunt; but turned away, as though impatient of the light. A sharp spasm seemed to pass through her frame, and she fell once more stiff and rigid upon the ground. She was carried home and conveyed to bed, where she lay many days. She continued most of the time in a state of half-consciousness, which was haunted by fantastic and exaggerated images of her last interview with Phillip,—such as pursue us in dreams, or in the watches of a sleepless night. She was haunted with arguments to reconcile him to what she had done, and to make him see it as she did; she talked to herself incessantly, and, always baffled, returned without pause to go over the whole case from the beginning. She blamed herself, and made the most touching and passionate appeals to him; then she would become stiff and rigid, and for a time lie like one dead.

"If we could only put a stop to this talking, and induce a natural slumber, we should have no fear; but if this state continues much longer, we do not disguise from you, my dear Madam, our very serious apprehensions as to the result: nature will be worn out."

This was the report of the two medical men who were in attendance. Margaret never left her bedside. She easily comprehended all that had taken place—

all that caused this illness. At length Constance slept, and the fever subsided; she began to recover—her youth and her good constitution had triumphed. But in proportion as she began to recover, she seemed to shrink from her aunt. She would not speak to her: she seemed to dislike her to be in the room. When able to be removed from her bed, she sat moody and silent, plunged in reverie, when roused from which, she manifested great impatience. At length she was allowed to go down stairs. Margaret had made the parlour look as bright and pleasant as possible. She placed her upon the sofa, and propped her with pillows that she might see the garden.

“Thank God, dear child, that you are restored to me!”

“I am not thankful. I wish I had died when I was so near it.”

“My child! my child! • How grieved I am to see you suffer: gladly would I take your burden on myself.”

“What do *you* know of sorrow? You are hard and cruel. You taught me misery; but you have no feeling.”

Margaret did not reply, but left the room.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MARGARET's face was deadly pale when she returned, and she looked years older than she had seemed on the day before. She had that worn, haggard look of suffering which might be expected in one just unbound from the rack.

She carried an old-fashioned tea equipage of delicate china on a little japan tray. Constance lifted her head with a dull, indifferent gaze as she entered, but seemed almost unconscious of her presence.

Margaret set down the tray, and going up to Constance, put her arms round her, and kissed her forehead, which she pressed to her bosom. Constance passively endured her caress, neither returning it nor repelling it. She turned her head wearily away, with a heavy sigh.

"You think me cruel, Constance," said Margaret, in a tone that was touching from its humility. "You have told me that I have no knowledge of the sacrifice I would impose on you. How shall I make you know that every suffering, almost every thought you have, I, too, have known and felt? and that if I could take your burden, gladly and thankfully would I bear your sorrow for you. If you will listen to me, I will tell you my history; it will at least show you that I, too, know what it is to be miserable."

Constance looked up: buried as she was in her own

suffering, the old desire to hear the secret of her aunt's life was not extinct; it was, perhaps, the only thing that could have won her attention just now.

"Yes, aunt, tell me; I should like to hear; and forgive me what I said—I did not think it would hurt you. I was very miserable; I did not think you would care about anything I could say—I am very sorry."

"Constance, I love you better than anything else in the world. You are the only treasure I set my heart on that is left to me; so it is not wonderful that your words pained me. But I did not blame you, my darling—not for an instant. I only thought how hard I must have appeared to you. It is not a light thing that would move me to open the grave of my past life. I want you to know that you may trust me. But, before I begin, let me give you some tea; I should like to see you eat something."

"Well, aunt, I will try; but I do not feel as if I should ever wish to eat again. If I might only die! It would be such a rest. How do people ever live to be eighty years old? How dreadful it must be!"

"I have often thought that," said Margaret; "but I do not think we shall be tried; and, at any rate, we know that we shall not be defrauded at last. I suppose none of us could endure life if it were not for the certain death that overshadows it."

"But have you felt that, aunt?" said Constance, in surprise. "I always thought you so wise and strong."

"My dear love, I may as well tell you, by way of preface, that all my present life, and nearly all my past, has been spent in the endeavour to live down, and make right, one fatal mistake, which I made when I was a girl not much older than yourself."

"Oh, aunt, tell me, if it will not make you ill; and see, I have drank my tea, and am better for it. Come and sit in this corner of the sofa, and let me lean my head against you—so."

Margaret leaned the young girl's head upon her bosom, and kissed her tenderly like a mother.

"If you go to sleep whilst I am talking, dear, so much the better."

"If I cannot help it, of course I will. But now begin."

"I shall seem very different to you at the end to what I do now," said Margaret in an unsteady, timid voice. "However," she continued, more firmly, "I will begin at the beginning, and you shall know everything."

"I was born in this very house. I lost my mother when I was four years old. I was the only girl; my brother—I had but one—was fourteen years older than myself. I came when all thought of another child had been long given up, and I was welcomed more like an angel than a mortal baby. After my mother died, I was sent to a lady—a relation of my mother's—to whom, on her death-bed, she begged my father to confide me, until I should be old enough to come home and be his companion. He used to come and see me frequently, and I remember him quite well; but when I was six years old he died too, and so I was left altogether to the guardianship of Mrs. Damer, who was a great personage in those days. She lived in London, and saw the very best company. Everyone who was at all remarkable for talent, or learning, or agreeableness, met at her house; and though she had never done anything herself, yet everybody thought it a distinction to visit her."

"I was taught everything that in those days it was thought necessary for a young woman to know. I had a great taste for music, and a fine voice, which was carefully cultivated. I danced, too, very well. For more useful matters, I fancy they were confined to the strictest necessities. I used to call Mrs. Damer, 'aunt,' although she was in reality only a distant relative. She was very handsome, with noble manners and a stately presence. She was the object of my youthful enthusiasm, and certainly I have never seen anyone so fascinating since. She early accustomed me to society; and when I was fourteen, I was regularly introduced. She had ceased to visit much herself, but on this occasion she went into public for the last time, to present me on the Birth-night."

She had set her heart upon my making a great match, and thought nothing would be too grand or too good for me.

"My father had left me five thousand pounds, which he considered 'was quite fortune enough for a single woman.' In those days I was considered a beauty; it was the fashion to call me one, and no one could live with Mrs. Damer without catching some perfume from her graces. I was, besides, her adopted daughter, which alone secured me the homage and attention of all who wished to pay their court to her. Except in matters of grace and deportment, I grew up without any contradiction or restraint. The example of my aunt, and an extremely good conceit of myself, enabled me to receive all the admiration that was offered to me with a superb indifference which I did not exactly feel; though, as a matter of course, when one has a great deal of a thing, one naturally does not set much value upon it. Well, I lived thus upon the mountain-tops of vanity until I was nearly sixteen. Offers of marriage I received in abundance, but none that offered the advantages which my aunt considered my due; they were all refused on the score of my being too young.

"If I knew but little of history and geography, my dear, I had in return read abundance of novels and old romances; long ponderous affairs, which no one would have patience with in these days; they were full of wonderful adventures, and difficulties, and, above all, of love. Everybody used to fall in love, then, and worship women till they married them, and then it was much the same as it is now, and has been from the beginning. I was very romantic, and thought that to have a noble and perfect hero for a lover, and to make some great sacrifice for his sake, would be the grandest as well as the happiest thing in the world. But none of the men who came to me upon their knees, declaring they were ready to die for me,—and they sometimes did commit extraordinary follies for my sake, (as they said, but I thought it was because they had not much sense,)—none of these men touched me in the least. I had set my imagination on a

hero, upon one who should oblige me to love and reverence him, and be as submissive to him as these other lovers were to me ; at whose feet I might lay down all the admiration that others gave me, and who, in return, was to be noble and distinguished, and to love me to distraction, and I was to be the envy of every other woman ; this last was a great ingredient. Everybody called me proud, and cold, and haughty, and insensible ; whereas, in truth, I was only waiting and wishing for somebody better and stronger than myself, to come and conquer me. But I sincerely believed myself to be irresistible, and began to weary of the monotony of receiving declarations from men I did not care for, and whom I tormented from sheer *ennui* and secret vexation, as boys pull off the legs and wings of flies without thinking of the pain they give.

“ I had turned sixteen, but was a long way from being seventeen, when, one evening at the play, where I was seldom allowed to appear, I saw a proud, stern, handsome man in the stage-box. He never once directed his glass towards me, although I was in the front row, and nearly opposite to him. At the end of the first act he went away, without my being able to flatter myself that he had even been conscious of my existence. This was quite a new sensation to me. I scarcely knew whether I was piqued or pleased. When I got home, I told my aunt.

“ ‘ Ah, it must be young Maurice Hill,’ said she ; ‘ he is the third son to the Marquis of Queenland. He was private secretary to his uncle, Lord Rossmore, when he went on his embassy. He is said to be very clever, very proud, and very bad tempered ; but I say he is only ambitious and discontented. He will make himself known in the world some of these days ; there is some stuff in him.’

“ My aunt thought no more of the matter. Maurice Hill, the discontented young man, who had not made his position in the world, was not one of the men she considered eligible for me ; her views were fixed entirely in another quarter. I went to an assembly soon after,

and met him there. He was presented to me, and we danced together. He was cold, unimpressible, and talked very little, but to me there was a charm in all he said. There was an impress of strength and reality about him quite different from the smiling insipidity and amiable adoration to which I had been accustomed. I was captivated, but I had not the least idea that I made any impression upon him. I believe, in the first instance, the difficulty was the charm. He got some one to present him to my aunt, and he came regularly every week to her receptions, and to the smaller parties whenever she invited him; but he was never a favourite of hers.

"Towards me he was not assiduous; he had rather a grave, kind, protecting manner, and I regarded him as so much above me, that I desired above all things his good opinion. One word from him meant so much more than he expressed. But though I desired so passionately his regard, yet I was constrained and timid with him, and I have often cried myself to sleep from aggravation at my own folly and stupidity. On the rare occasions when he gave me an opportunity to show myself to advantage, I could not talk to him: I could only listen to what he said as though they were the words of an angel from heaven; and I read through a weary book of history—Ducler's 'Civil Wars of France'—for no other earthly reason than because I once overheard him speaking of it to some man of his acquaintance, as a work in which he had been much interested. Occasionally, a word or a look made me think that he cared for me, but I never could feel quite sure; and I wearied myself with turning and weighing them, to discover all the meaning that might be hidden in them.

"He was the only real person I came near; all other men were so many shadows glancing on the wall.

"Suddenly he disappeared—I knew not what had become of him. I tormented myself with the idea that I had offended him, or that he had taken a disgust at seeing other men hovering round me and

paying me attention, though Heaven knows they had their labour for their pains. Now I treated them worse than ever.

After he had been gone about a fortnight, I heard, quite accidentally, that he had been appointed *aide-de-camp* to General Somebody, and had gone abroad with him—we were always at war in those days, in some place or other. The pang of mortification at finding that I had not in the least been thought of in the matter, showed me how vain all my hopes had been; and I began to feel indignant at myself for caring so much for a man who thought nothing about me, and I resolutely began to try to crush him out of my heart. I had carefully laid by all the dresses, flowers, ribbons, &c., which I had worn when he had been good to me, and considered them as a species of fetish which would bring that good time over again: these, in a fit of self-contempt, I magnanimously burned, and they set the chimney of my room on fire, and my aunt came running in to know what was the matter. I think she guessed, for she looked at the *débris*, and smiled to herself, but asked no questions.

“Amongst my other admirers there was one, a very good man, a fine noble affectionate nature, who was very much in love with me. He was a man of birth and education, and had a fine fortune! he was handsome, too—in short, it seemed as if nothing but the very genius of perverseness could make any woman whom he addressed other than propitious. I suppose I was perverse, for I had always treated him very ill indeed; but he still persevered. In my newly-found strength of resentment, I began to feel remorse for my indifference, and thought I would try to behave better to him, and see if I could manage to like him. My aunt always upheld his suit, and would have been delighted to see me married to him. I knew and felt that he loved me deeply, and that gave a strange distaste to him: however, I really tried to be kinder to him, as I knew by myself all I made him suffer. Well, on the strength of my more gracious manner, he began to seem so dreadfully happy

and uplifted, that I absolutely hated him ; and what was worse, I felt now that I had given him encouragement, and began to fear I should be obliged to marry him in spite of myself.

“More than three months had passed since Maurice Hill had left England : I had heard nothing of him. One evening, at an assembly where I had been taken, much against my will, by a friend of my aunt’s who always *chaperoned* me when I went into public, I was feeling more than usually depressed and wretched, ill at ease in my own conscience—for I knew how ill I was using this other person—and feeling, moreover, that matters must come to a crisis in a day or two at furthest ; I cannot describe the horrible perplexity in which I felt I had involved myself ; it was like being pursued by a bad dream ; I saw no escape ; I looked round with a feeling of sick despair, when I saw *him* standing in the door-way—so pale, so changed from what he had been ! His arm was in a sling, and he looked as though just risen from a sick bed. His eyes were fixed upon me. What my looks said, I know not, but he came quietly forward and stood by my side. I seemed turned to stone or lead by the very intenseness of emotion ; I could not turn my head to look at him, nor speak one word.

“‘Margaret,’ he said, in a low voice—it was the first time he had called me thus—‘Margaret, I am here ; may I remain ?’ I do not know whether I said ‘Yes’ with my lips ; for I felt unable either to move or speak. His eyes seemed to cover me like a burning-glass : I felt them burning me, though my head was bent down.

“‘Is it for ever ?’ he asked, in the same quiet, suppressed tone. ‘I will go away again, if you desire me.’

“‘When did I desire you to go away ?’ asked I, in a voice that seemed scarcely my own.

“‘Not in words, but you were the cause. They told me you were engaged to be married since I left : I could not endure to let you go without coming to hear

from your own lips that it was your own choice. Is it true?’

“‘No,’ said I, feeling as if a mountain had been removed from my heart.

“‘May I come to you to-morrow ! I can say nothing amongst all these people.’

“I do not think we spoke again. He remained beside my chair, All I can imagine or ever felt of happiness was mine that evening. I was tranquil, stupid almost from the very fulness and excess of feeling. I seemed taken out of myself, and living with another life. Suddenly I started up as from a sleep ; the party was going on as usual, with its Babel of tongues. A card-table near me was just breaking up ; only a few moments had passed ; I was like that king who seemed to himself to have lived seven years during the moment of dipping his head into a pail of water ! He was gone. I would almost have doubted that he had been there. It was his departure that had broken the spell, though the enchantment lingered still.

“The other man—he who I told you loved me so much—came up to me. He looked so miserable that even I remarked it, and inquired if he were ill. A gleam of light passed over his face.

“‘Tell me, Margaret, the worst,—is all that I have seen true, or is there still hope?’

“‘Yes, yes ; thank God, it is true. I did not know. I did not hope before.’

“‘I know—I see all now. God bless you, Margaret ; no other man will love you as I do. Say farewell, at least ; you shall never see me again.’

“The expression of his face has haunted me ever since. His voice was almost extinct, but there was nothing weak or unmanly about him ; no attempt to rouse my sympathy, and his very lips were pale with suffering. I never was so nearly loving him as at that moment. I felt so intensely grateful for his generous forbearance.

“‘Tell me you forgive me,’ I said, passionately, ‘or

I shall never forgive myself. I did not know he cared for me.'

"I know you did not. I know all. I understand all now. Will you not say "God bless you," before I go?'

"I put out my hand to him, and burst into tears. He grasped it as in a lock of ice, and then he left me, feeling as one might who has committed a murder to obtain an inheritance.

"But you are tired now, darling," said Margaret, breaking off, and leaning over Constance. "I will tell you the rest to-morrow. I cannot go on now."

"Poor aunt! and I said you had no knowledge of these things; don't tell me any more if it is painful."

"Yes, dear, you shall hear the remainder, but now come to bed, perhaps you will sleep after so long a story."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE next day Constance did not ask her aunt to renew her story, though she was very anxious to hear it. She endeavoured to exert herself to be more alive, and to seem as little unhappy as possible. She voluntarily took up a piece of embroidery, though it was not much progress she made. Margaret, who had nerved herself up for her task, was anxious to accomplish it. Seeing Constance thus occupied, she said, "Now, dear, shall I tell you the rest?" She sat down in her chair, leaning her head upon her hand to shade it, and looking steadfastly into the fire, began:—

"The next morning, at breakfast, a note was brought in by the servant that made my heart stand still. I had never seen his handwriting, but I knew it by instinct. My aunt read it, and gave it to me across the table, saying, 'Had you any expectation of this?'

"It was a formal request that she would grant him an interview—very brief; but leaving no doubt of the object.

"I replied, as well as I was able, that he had asked my permission to speak to her.

"And what do you propose with regard to Mr. Aubrey, whom you have encouraged, and of whose intentions you have been perfectly aware; as he had my sanction for his addresses?"

"I told her that Mr. Aubrey was gone away, and

would not return. This made her extremely angry, and brought down on me a long lecture for my heartlessness, vanity, and coquetry ; at which I felt very indignant, as my conscience by no means acquitted me for the part I had played. However, the note was answered with formal politeness, and an hour fixed for the important audience.

"In the course of the morning a letter came from Aubrey, announcing his departure. It was a very touching note,—all the more so that it made no display of suffering. He sent the most kind message to me, and begged that my aunt would not blame me in any way for what had occurred ; and declared that his highest esteem and admiration would always attend me.

"My aunt was much mortified. She liked him ; it was a match she had set her heart upon for me, and she had a strong prejudice against Maurice. I felt very anxious as to the reception she would give him. I did not think that anything could have given me annoyance at such a time ; but I knew how haughty and almost insolent she could be upon occasions, and I feared even now that he might withdraw in displeasure.

"At length the appointed hour came. My aunt, dressed in her stiffest state, sat in her own private cabinet to receive him. I heard him come up stairs, and the door of my aunt's room closed upon him.

"Oh ! how much I longed to have seen him for a moment, to have entreated his patience, though I should never have dared to utter a word if the opportunity had been afforded.

"The period of their interview seemed to me interminable. Once or twice, as I strained my ear, I imagined I heard angry voices ; but that must have been a delusion, as I was too distant to have heard them.

"At length I was summoned.

"When I opened the door, he was leaning against the chimney-piece : he looked pale and agitated ; my aunt, dignified and handsome, sat like a queen.

"'Margaret,' said she, 'Mr. Hill has been requesting me to sanction his addresses to you, intimating that he

had obtained your permission. Doubtless he does us both great honour,' and her lip curled with a fine disdain; 'but as he owns that he has come without his father's knowledge, and, indeed, without ascertaining his feelings in any way, I have told him that I cannot entertain his proposal until his father, the Earl, has expressed his approbation of the alliance. It is quite impossible that you should enter into any family unwilling to receive you.'

"I heard every word distinctly, though not with my outward senses, for I felt turned to stone.

"'Hear me, Margaret,' said he, advancing, and taking my hand; 'do not be led away by pride to destroy the life-time of us both. I am past the age when a father has the right to dispose of the destiny of his son. Have I not striven to avoid coming into collision with him? Have I not known you, seen you constantly, loved you, and accepted you for my fate since the first instant? You fancied that I was cold, and did not care for you. Ah! you have never spoken a word in my hearing that I could not repeat. I loved you to madness, but I put an iron constraint upon myself, because I knew that I had no position to offer you. I accepted that appointment because it took me away when I had no longer strength to resist you; and did I not nearly lose you? When I was wounded and sent home, I bitterly wished I had been killed instead. And now I appeal to you, Margaret; I love you—love you, and it is my love that has conquered you and drawn you to me. I have every right to be my own master—will you sacrifice me to an idle punctilio? My father is a foolish, rash old man, he may accede to my request or he may not; it is more than likely he will refuse, for no reason but his own fantastic humour. I will do all a son may do to win him. I would have all honour paid to you, but should he refuse, say that *you* will not.'

"He spoke in a hoarse, choked voice, with a suppressed vehemency that made me tremble. His eyes, which seemed to emit light, were fixed on me with passionate entreaty.

"I had no time to reply, even if I had been able, for my aunt, rising with dignity, said, 'My niece is a young girl, unacquainted with what is due to herself or her family. On her behalf, I tell you that I request you to keep away from this house until you can come accompanied by your father. This has been a painful interview, it is now ended.'

"I looked at him on hearing this dreadful speech, feeling only the agony of having caused it. He looked at me, with a strange smile; all his agitation had passed away. He bowed to my aunt, with an air of respect, as a man who receives a sentence from which he will not appeal, and said, quite gently, 'Go to your aunt, dear Margaret, and trust in me.'

"In another moment he had left the room. I burst into tears, although, it must be owned, that I did not feel very miserable; indeed, only two days ago, my present position would have seemed to me the height of happiness. Still I feared that my aunt had irrevocably offended him, and that he would never return. It seemed to me that his treatment had been very unworthy, and I longed to make him some atonement. My aunt allowed me to weep in peace for a few moments; she then said, 'Margaret, Margaret, I fear you will live to repent of your wilfulness. You have allowed that young man to know his power over you. If he is worthy, if he deserves all you have laid at his feet, he will find the means to win you honourably, without seeking to degrade you by a stolen or unwelcome marriage. He is a poor lover who, secure of your love, cannot overcome greater difficulties than these.'

"'But if he cannot?' sobbed I; 'if his father be immovable, and refuse? He cannot do what does not depend on himself.'

"'You, at least, can do right,' replied she, sternly. 'And, believe me, child,' she added, in a softened voice, 'that it will cost you less suffering to do right, even though you have to give him up, than to take a wrong step to win him. To enter his family, unless they are prepared to receive you, would place you in a false

position, scarcely inferior to what would be entailed by a grievous fault.'

"I thought her dreadfully cold and worldly. What did I care for myself, or for what I should suffer? Had he not told me that the welfare of his whole life was in my keeping? Her speech made me cry bitterly. I was afraid that he would be honourable according to my aunt's notion, and never come near me again; or that he might go abroad, as he had done before.

"In the course of the day, my aunt wrote a formal letter to his father, informing him of the nature of his son's proposals, requesting to know whether it was with his sanction, and intimating that without it his son would not be received into her house.

"My aunt was celebrated for the elegance and originality of her letters; this was no exception. She showed it to me, and I could find no fault with it; indeed, I thought in my heart that it could not fail to make an impression upon the individual to whom it was addressed; and I laughed at the notion that perhaps he would fall in love with my aunt! He was a widower, I should have told you. Maurice lost his mother when he was fifteen, and although he never professed to feel any filial affection for his father, he idolized the memory of his mother, and had often said that my aunt resembled her.

"Well, the letter went. It was one of my aunt's reception evenings; but though I pleaded hard to remain in peace up stairs, she insisted upon my appearing, and remarked, in rather a sarcastic tone, that there was no occasion why an offer of marriage should be celebrated by an attack of vapours. I knew there was no appeal, and dressed, and appeared accordingly. My dear, that was the last evening in which I ever played my part in society in England. I did not foresee it then, or I might perhaps have regarded it with more interest; as it was, it seemed wearisome enough.

"The next morning brought the Earl in his chariot to my aunt's door. I saw him from the parlour window as he ascended the steps, leaning on the arm of his foot-

man. He was a handsome, fine-looking old man, but with haughty, sarcastic features, which bore a disagreeable resemblance to his son's, and sent a pang like ice to my heart, for I foreboded no good. He was shown, as his son had previously been, into my aunt's cabinet, from which, of course, I was excluded. They remained there together for nearly half-an-hour. When he had departed, my aunt sent for me; a scornful smile sat upon her handsome mouth. She looked up as I entered. 'Margaret,' said she, 'Lord Queenland has been here, as no doubt you are aware. He gave himself the trouble to come in person, to beg that I would not encourage his son's infatuation for you, as he could never give it his sanction. I assured him that his son would never be received without it. This was the business part of our interview. The rest of the time was consumed by him in expressions of politeness and consideration, and compliments to your beauty and fascination; to all which I listened with the attention they deserved.'

"But what reason did he assign?" said I, impatiently.

"He began a profuse statement of what he called his reasons, but I told him the *fact* was sufficient, and cut that portion of his speech short. It was then that he expanded into complimentary assurances. Now, my child, here is an occasion for you to exercise the good sense and self-control you possess. You cannot, without loss of delicacy and self-respect, take any sort of step. Maurice is aware of your preference; that is sufficient, or ought to be. Let him overcome the obstacles which exist only upon his own side. You can make no attempt to overstep them without defeating your own end. I know Maurice, and I tell you it will loosen your hold upon him, and not secure it.'

"I had always had a hankering after being a heroine, and here I was regularly installed in the position of one; but I found the reality much less agreeable than in books. Indeed, I can speak from experience, that the more one's real life resembles a novel, the more uncomfortable it is.

"That evening's post brought me a letter from

Maurice. I have it still, and you shall see it, but not now. He told me that he had had a stormy interview with his father after his return from our house; that in consequence of the excitement his wound, which was barely healed, had broken out afresh. He was in bed, and likely to be kept there for some time, but he entreated me, in the most moving terms, not to give him up, and declared his intention to win me against the whole world. You may imagine the effect of such a letter from him upon me. It was the first time I had ever seen his handwriting, and oh! how beautiful to me looked the letters that formed his name!

"I gave the letter to my aunt, because I was too proud and imperious to do anything that was clandestine, and also because I thought that it would make her admire, and do justice to the writer.

"She read it through most stoically, and then returned it to me, saying,—

"Let him prove his words. I will be the first to congratulate him, and own myself wrong; but that young man, with all his imperious will and love of determination, has one capital flaw in his character: he cannot accept a position of his own making. He desires to enjoy the advantages of what he accepts, as well as those of the alternative he rejects. He is ambitious, too,—and his ambition and desire to make a career for himself are much deeper rooted than his love for you,—though I grant that his love burns the more fiercely of the two just now. Margaret, if ever you are tempted to put yourself in that man's power, you will repent once, which will be always. And now understand, that I will have no tampering with your position; you will neither see nor correspond with that young man whilst you remain under my roof.'

"I was too angry and indignant to reply. I took up my candle, and marched into my own room with the air of a princess.

"As I neither could nor would give the required promise, it was agreed that I should go for a short time to visit my brother at the Chantry, this very house,

where I had not been for years. That I might have no insuperable temptation to transgress her laws, my aunt wisely and kindly procured information concerning the state of Maurice's wound through the medical man, whom she knew. All danger was over, and he was convalescent. It is a great comfort to me to reflect that I parted affectionately from my aunt. Stern and uncompromising as she had been in this matter, she loved me tenderly, and no harsh words, even upon this point, had jarred our relationship; she sympathised with me, although she would not yield.

"Well, my dear, I came down here. Your father was then a very little boy; he will tell you that he remembers that visit. I was very fond of him, he was my pet and comfort during that miserable, harassing time: he was quite different to the rest of the family, with whom I had little in common. Maurice, who had of course easily discovered my retreat, wrote me letter after letter of the most passionate attachment,—sometimes they were full of hope, but oftener of despondency. I could not resist his entreaties for letters in reply. In this lonely place you may imagine that his letters were even more precious than if I had been still with my aunt. I had nothing to distract my thoughts from him here.

"At the end of a month he came down. He had evidently been very ill; the change I saw in him went to my heart. He had had a relapse after my departure, and been very nearly dead, but had made light of it in his letters, lest he should seem to take advantage of my anxiety. I cannot tell you how much this delicacy touched me. The physicians had ordered him abroad, and he came to plead for a secret marriage with me before he went. Constance, I cannot express to you what I felt at the idea of his going abroad, ill—perhaps to die—with no relative near him; whilst I, if I were his wife, might be always near him, and attend upon him;—what a privilege that seemed! If he had been going away to live at a Court, and be in grandeur, it would not have touched or tempted me; but to be his

nurse in sickness—to be a comfort to him—was too great a blessedness to be rejected. Constance, I should not have been the fool I was, if it had not been for the attraction of the false generosity of ‘sacrificing myself.’ The private marriage he desired would not have enabled me to accompany him abroad, unless by the announcement of it I had been willing to embroil him with his father beyond all retrieve, which he evidently did not desire, and I knew it would be the ruin of all his prospects.”

“Well, aunt, and what *did* you consent to do?” asked Constance, with sudden impatience.

“My dear, in those days this was a more Catholic neighbourhood than it is at present. All the farmers were Catholics, and the priest was a good, kind old man, with whom I had made a sort of friendship. I could talk to him freely, and I told him everything about myself. I was very miserable, and it was a great comfort. He in his turn had spoken of the heavy penal laws that were against Catholics; and I looked upon him as if he had been one of the early Christians. He was a truly good man, and his labours were indefatigable amongst his scattered flock. I knew that by his Church, marriage is held even more sacred than by ours; it is an indissoluble sacrament; but by the laws of England no marriage celebrated by a Catholic priest would be legal, nor could even the form be gone through without exposing him to very heavy punishment.

“A plan suggested itself to my imagination which I thought would meet all my difficulties. I told Maurice that if he would marry me in Father Bernard’s little chapel, I would consent. My brother and my aunt were the only persons to be informed of it. I would go abroad with him, and the world might think and say what it pleased.

“At first he started back from the proposal. He explained, that although the marriage might be legal enough abroad, yet in England it would not stand good for an instant; that, in fact, it would be no marriage at all.

“‘I shall know that I am your wife,’ I replied; ‘that which constitutes a marriage in one country cannot be very wrong in another. All that makes the sanctity of marriage is there—that suffices to me. I shall be in your power—if you ever cease to love me, you can be free.’

“He replied, in fervent words, he believed in the eternity of his love as firmly as I did myself.

“There was something in my proposal which chimed in with his own wild, imperious will. That man, my dear, was accustomed to dominate over everyone who came in his way, and his illness (I believe now) had been mainly caused by finding his father’s will as inflexible as his own.

“He still urged a legal marriage in secret, but the fatally romantic notion of sacrificing myself to save him from a breach with his father, had taken hold of my imagination. I knew that the first thing my own family would do with a secret marriage would be to proclaim it, or, if they were kept in ignorance, to follow him and force him ‘to do me justice;’ and to be left behind, a widowed wife, was far more terrible than anything the world could have said. After a while he consented to accept my plan, and we were married by dear Father Bernard in his chapel. The dear, good old man had not yielded to my entreaties without difficulty; but I knew how to work upon his scruples, and I am sorry to say that I abused them. However, married we were. The old man gave me a certificate and his blessing. I wrote to my aunt, telling her what I had done, and enclosed her the certificate, which I did not care to keep. Maurice had a carriage in waiting, and we started at once for Dover, where we embarked without delay for France.

“When you judge me, Constance, recollect I was not seventeen.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

“WELL, my dear, I was happy, very happy ! I felt no sort of misgiving. I thought I had done something that was far better than right, and I had never been accustomed to think or feel according to any rule, but my own notion of what was right.

“We proceeded at once towards the south of France. The state of my husband’s health gave me great anxiety. He had taken a violent cold on his journey to the Chantry, which materially aggravated all his unfavourable symptoms, and before we reached Hyères, the place where we had determined to pass the autumn and winter, he had become almost unable to travel. However, we reached it at last, and established ourselves in the chief street, called La Rue de Paradis, and here he fell so seriously ill that his life was despaired of. Oh ! how often I congratulated myself that I had not allowed him to come alone—that I was there with him—that I had the right to be with him and tend him. I certainly was miserably anxious about him ; but the intense pleasure of being his nurse—of waiting upon him—of having him dependent upon me, and belonging to me exclusively, was such exquisite happiness that it fairly balanced the pain. I did not believe he would die. I felt confidence in my own passionate will, to keep death at bay. In all illness a great deal, humanly speaking,

depends upon the nurse ; and in this case, you may be sure, he had everything that could be contrived or imagined for his good. At last the medical men declared the danger for this time past, and nothing to be guarded against except a relapse. I seemed to inspire him with my own health and strength. I could see him revive more and more every day. His old proud, cold manner was quite gone—he became as cheerful and gay as a child.

“This illness bound him to me more closely than years of an ordinary existence could have done. His restoration to health was in some sort my own work ; and, in addition to the romantic reverence and worship with which I had always regarded him, there now mingled a sentiment of unutterable tenderness—something like what I should fancy a mother must feel towards her child.

“Whilst we were at Hyères, I received a letter from my aunt—a noble, generous letter, although she must bitterly have felt the step I had taken. She expressed no resentment. There was neither a reproach nor a sententious observation throughout—there was a kindness and sympathy which showed that she could enter into my motives : but also a foresight that could not blind itself to consequences ; and it was written to strengthen and console me when evil days should arrive. One line in it has been a strength and stay to me when I have needed both. ‘My dear Margaret,’ she said, ‘never cease to hold fast your self-respect. The world, no doubt, will make you suffer ; but recollect, you have acted under a firm conviction that what you did was right, and even noble. Abide by your own conscience, and do not allow *consequences* to inspire a weak remorse.’

“I did not know the full meaning of this at the time, but I thought my aunt was very good ; and I wrote her a letter, such as she would have desired, but she never received it: before it reached England she was dead. She died quite unexpectedly, after a few hours’ illness ; that letter to me was perhaps the last work she ever

did in this world. Henceforth, I had nothing in life except my husband, to whom I clung with more devotion every day. My dear Constance, that self-abandonment, self-devotion, becomes dreadfully fatiguing and wearying to the object of it in a very short time—no human being can be made an idol with impunity, but I did not then know this. It is very intoxicating to be able to love with one's whole heart, and whom may a woman love in this world, if it be not her own husband? We travelled through Italy, and spent our next winter in Rome. I am not going to tell you all I felt, and thought, and saw, in Italy; that period certainly developed all I possessed of intellect and feeling for what is beautiful. I should like you, my Constance, to visit Italy, and who knows but we may achieve it yet!

"My husband knew a great deal; indeed, he was a cultivated and accomplished man, and at first he took pleasure in instructing me, and reading with me. I owe much to him in that respect. He made me take lessons in singing; and all that he seemed to desire or admire, that I laboured earnestly to become.

"But I was blind to a certain change that was beginning to come over him. Perhaps, had I earlier seen it, I might have so ordered my conduct and our mode of living, that the cloud might have been dispersed; but I know not, for when a change of affection sets in, it proceeds with a rapidity that cannot be calculated. In my girlish imagination, I had believed that once loved, was loved for ever, especially when people were married. With all my worship and devotion, I had never understood the character of Maurice; indeed, my very love had blinded me to its most obvious traits. I can see all now, but in those days it was not so.

"We had travelled a great deal. We had been all over Italy, and had visited Spain and Portugal; neither avoiding society nor seeking it, receiving, in fact, much civility and attention, and finding ready access to all that was most worth seeing. The third winter we returned to Naples. I rejoiced at the prospect of having him all to myself once more, and anticipated

a renewal of our former readings and studies. But he had grown weary of this objectless, purposeless wandering way of life. His health had now been long re-established, and he began to wish for a career such as might have employed his energies had he remained in England,

"To England we could not return; my position there would have been equivocal; the rest of the world was before us, to go where we would, but it was to England that he precisely wished to go.

"English letters, English news, English papers, were all that he cared to see or read. He had kept up a correspondence with his brother, and from him he learned the state of parties; the dissolution of an old Ministry, which had seemed to hold their power *en perpétuité*, and the opening offered by the accession of another party to the young man in a position and with the talents of Maurice.

"My aunt always told me he was ambitious, but I did not heed her; her words conveyed no meaning to me. At that time, too, his worldly ambition was in abeyance to a violent passion for me, which had now been thoroughly *exploité*, and shame for his slothful, purposeless life, began to make itself felt,—the vague, unexpressed sense of remorse at talents unemployed—talents which weighed upon him like a burden, with no prospect, no outlet for escape into action, for which he pined. He became morose, quick tempered, bitter in his words, and nothing I said or did seemed to afford him the least pleasure. I was then in the full radiance of whatever beauty I possessed, far handsomer than I had been when I left England. The children in the streets used to stand still to look at me when I went out, and I was made to understand, in every possible way, by men in general, that they considered me a very beautiful woman. But all the spell of my beauty was gone. What did I care that the whole world should admire me, when *he* for whom alone I lived had become indifferent—more than indifferent, for I feared he began to detest me, and I felt so helpless. I had loved him with my entire soul,

laid myself and my beauty, and everything I possessed, at his feet, and there was no more that I could do. I fancied that if we had had children, they would have bound us together, and prevented this terrible gulf from opening between us, which I had seen growing wider and wider, and deeper and deeper, from the first little crevice, until now it looked like a black abyss. Once, at this time, I expressed to him my regret that we had no prospect of children.

“‘Thank God,’ said he, bitterly; ‘with them our position would indeed be complicated : it is bad enough as it is.’

“I shrunk back. I felt as though I had been shrivelled up by lightning. From that moment I ceased to hope, and I saw what my own act had done !

“My dear Constance, abnegation and self-sacrifice are noble words, noble things ; but recollect that no sacrifice is, or can be, noble, unless it be made for a worthy object ; and no form that self-pleasing can take, is other than mean and base. SELF, in any disguise, is a snare. Let no notion of romantic generosity ever blind you. Believe *me*, that romance, when taken into daily life, soon gets tarnished.

“I left his presence after that speech, resolved to commit suicide, for I felt that I was his rock a-head in life. I had thought to conciliate all difficulties, and to save him both from the pain of losing me, and the penalty of marrying me. I had thought to leave him free, and I had hung myself with a heavy chain like a millstone round his neck, fettering him tenfold more than the most unpropitious legal tie could have done. There is no escape from the natural responsibility of any position we assume. He stood towards me in the relation of a husband, and I could not release him, except by death. I cannot express to you the wild despair that filled me when the natural consequence of what I had done, first flashed upon me. I had degraded *him* by forcing my own sacrifice upon him. I had spared him a temporary suffering, to chain him in exile so long as his father lived. All the objections, the folly, the useless-

ness of what I had done, stood out more and more clearly, until I was nearly mad, if not quite. Pacing up and down my room, a book struck my eye; it was a Bible my aunt had given me long ago, when I was a little girl. I opened it; the first sentence my eye lighted upon seemed like a *sortes* :—

“‘Ye shall be filled with the fruit of your own ways.’

“Had the book spoken with a human voice, I could not have been more startled. I opened it again; the same fatality attended me. The words I saw were :—

“He gave them their hearts’ desire, but sent leanness withal into their soul.’

“I laid down the book. I had heard a doom which my conscience accepted as speaking to *me* individually.

“I felt that there was no more hope for me; that I had received my good things, and that the rest of my life would be exacted as a payment. If I had only succeeded in my aim of sparing him suffering, I would have rejoiced. As it was, my only idea was how I might free him from the burden I had laid upon him. I did not wish him to feel either remorse or regret; I knew that when he was set free from me he would think of me with love and regret, and that I should dwell in his memory for ever; only he would forget his own impatience and coldness in the latter days he had lived beside me.

“This turn of meditation soothed me; there was yet one thing I might do to win back his love,—to die.

“I began with the most lucid insanity, to plan what I would do, and how I would do it. He was to be set free; but I did not wish regret or remorse to come near him! I settled that I would persuade him to make a journey to England, to see how things were going on, and what his prospects were if he should wish to return. I was to remain behind until he could either send for me or could rejoin me. I thought that when he was fairly gone, I would begin to pretend illness, slight at first; and then I would write him another letter, perhaps two,

to pour out all my whole soul to him ; for of late all I felt and suffered had been congealed in my heart ; but I could write, and I would tell him all (except this one secret), that he might have none but pleasant thoughts of me ; and then I determined to drown myself. It was the only species of violent death that did not give me repugnance. There was a fine marble bath near our residence, where I was accustomed to go alone. I knew I could give my death all the appearance of an accident. We were well known, and the news would be sure to reach him, and no one would ever suspect anything below the appearance of things. Oh, I intended to manage all so cautiously ! The plan fascinated me. I followed it through all its details. I breathed freely once more. I had recovered my power. I was no longer helpless and crushed down by misery. I held my fate in my own hands, and felt strong and proud ; happy, too, strange as it may sound.

"My meditations were interrupted by Nanny (the old Nanny who is here now) knocking at my door. She came to tell me that an English gentleman had just arrived, and had asked for the master. They were in the verandah together, now. That the master had seemed very much surprised, and desired her to bring refreshments immediately. She had come for the keys to get at the wine.

"I gave them to her, and went directly to the room we generally occupied. I wished to know who and what it was. The room was empty. I heard voices in the verandah, and saw Maurice, and a person dressed like an English clergyman, pacing up and down before the windows.

"I could see from my husband's countenance that the stranger brought grave tidings. In a few moments they entered the room. With a slight, almost imperceptible hesitation, my husband presented the stranger to me as the Rev. Abraham Somebody, his cousin. I could have laughed, had I not felt a flash of indignation at the sudden reserve and freezing gravity with which he bowed to me, mingled as it was with an impertinent

look of curiosity. He seemed to think he had come in contact with an improper person, and showed that he considered me as such. It was the first time I had been made to feel that my position was equivocal. I was annoyed at my husband, who had not introduced me at all, and it roused in me a spirit of haughty self-assertion, of which an hour previously I could not have believed myself capable.

"I was prepared, as I thought, to endure the blame of the whole world for what I had done ; but to see an ill-bred, pompous ass of a man like this sitting in judgment upon me, before my face, made me furious ! However, with disdainful politeness I proposed that we should sit down to table, and I did the honours as one quite conscious of my perfect right to be there. But this flash of self-love speedily faded, when I heard the tidings he had brought. Lord Hill, who was now my husband's only surviving brother, was dangerously ill, and this cousin had been dispatched to induce Maurice, if possible, to return with him to England immediately. My husband was much attached to this brother, who was the only one in the family aware of his real position with me.

"This sudden summons only anticipated the step I had myself resolved upon. Nevertheless, I felt as though stricken with death. I remember nothing further until I found myself lying upon the bed in my own room, Nanny and Maurice hanging over me with pale, terrified looks, and a stranger, who looked like a doctor, holding my pulse. I was covered with blood, which trickled from my arm. I had lain so long in a state of rigid insensibility that a vein had at last been opened, which, I suppose, was what brought me to myself. As soon as I opened my eyes, the doctor ordered the room to be cleared, that I might be kept quite quiet, and on no account agitated. I burst into a wild fit of laughter at hearing these directions so gravely issued ; for the memory of what was impending came back with the first flash of consciousness. The laughter ended in a violent flood of tears, during which the room was

cleared of every one but my husband, who knelt down beside me, and I sobbed myself calm against his heart.

“‘When do you go?’ I said, at length.

“‘Never;’ replied he, ‘if it makes you suffer thus. I know I have been stern and harsh of late; and you have thought——’ And then he uttered the most passionate words of love and remorse. He was a man in despair; his very soul seemed torn within him. But in this recoil of tenderness, I only saw one thing—that his mind was fixed to depart, and that he was only feeling the natural pang of separating from me. I might have obtained from him a delay—promises to return—promises to announce our marriage to the world—anything that would have consoled me, or mitigated the pain he was suffering at that moment, for he felt remorse as well as grief. I endeavoured to calm him. I told him how I had resolved to urge a journey to England, and the necessity there was that he should return there, at least for a time. I swallowed down my own despair, and he was grateful for it. I exacted from him no promise of any kind, but tried to make his departure as easy as possible.

“His words of endearment were precious to my heart, and in his grief I saw the evidence of his love, which I feared had become extinct. I would have purchased this re-assurance under a heavier penalty

“After the lapse of some time, there was a knock at the door. It was one of the servants with a message from the cousin, hoping that I was better; and to say that it was time to depart, as the vessel was to leave the harbour that evening.

“It is strange, but at that moment I felt nothing. I heard every word, though spoken in a whisper. He returned to me, held me violently strained to his heart; his lips were colder than ice; but I felt no emotion. I heard the grinding of the carriage wheels beneath the window—he was, indeed, gone!

“That night, and for many days afterwards, my life

was despaired of. I had a succession of those nervous spasms which you once witnessed, alternating with long fits of insensibility. I have been subject to them at times ever since. Old Nanny nursed me devotedly; but I think it was the secret belief that my husband's love for me was not yet attained, which enabled me to live and recover.

"I received a letter from my husband as soon as it was possible for one to arrive, and it was all that my heart could have desired.

"Shortly after his return to England, his brother died; and his father's health was so precarious, that, by the dying recommendation of his brother, he did not distress him by revealing the position in which he stood towards me. To this I gave my hearty concurrence. I felt quite secure that at the right time my husband would claim me in the sight of the world.

"The old Earl died within three months of his son, and Maurice succeeded to the title and estates.

"The letter that announced this was abrupt and forced; but I considered that he was, doubtless, overwhelmed with business, and harassed by many claims upon his time; that, perhaps, he was preparing to come and fetch me. Now that all difficulties were cleared away, I should have felt it like sacrilege to doubt him.

"Weeks lengthened into months, and he neither came nor wrote. I lived in complete seclusion in the house where he left me. I saw no one, and received no more intelligence of the outer-world than if I had been in a convent. I could bear the dead weight of this silence no longer; I went to the banker through whom we had always received our money, to know if he had heard from England.

"He received me politely, but with a certain alteration in his manner which I could not define, but which struck me as unpleasant. He could tell me nothing; or, at least, he would not tell me anything, except that he had received in due course, the usual remittances of money, which were to be paid to me by his lordship's own

direction. I desired to see the letter. It was brief, business-like, and written with my husband's own hand.

"He had found time to write to his banker—none to address me. This state of things I could no longer endure. That very day I determined to depart for England, and ascertain what it really was I had to look for. I could endure the worst certainty, but not lead my life thus in the dark.

"My arrangements were soon made, and accompanied only by Nanny, I took the next vessel that sailed for England.

"We arrived safely; and I proceeded at once to London, where I might have felt lonely enough if I had had leisure to indulge in sentimental comparisons between the last time, when I was the centre of an admiring circle in my aunt's house, and now, when I was doubtful where to find a house to receive me.

"I recollected that a favourite maid of my aunt's had married, and taken a house, which she let off in apartments. In my aunt's last letter, the name of the street where she lived had been incidentally mentioned. If she were still alive I knew she would be glad to receive me, for I had known her since I was a child. That perplexity was soon set at rest; she opened the door herself, and not only took me in, but cried over me as if she had been my mother. An English *home*-feeling came back to my heart that did me good. From Mrs. Rochester I learned all that had happened at my aunt's after my departure; details of her last illness, and a precious message which she had left for me with Mary Rochester, in case she should ever see me again. Ah, my dear Constance, you do not know the happiness of finding yourself amongst your own people of long ago, after living with strangers of yesterday.

"I wrote a note to my husband, telling him what I had done, and entreating him to come to me. I expected him all the next day, but the hours passed and did not bring him. The day following was Sunday, and I went with Mrs. Rochester to the Foundling Church. The

good creature had a pew there, of which she was extremely proud; it was the one distinctive piece of respectability on which she prided herself, and I went with her because I was too nervous and restless to stop at home. I thought the English service might compose me a little. The pew was in the front row of the gallery, on the side of the pulpit; the good woman fussed about to give me the best seat and the largest Prayer-book. It was the occasion of some sermon for some charity or other; the church was rapidly filling with a most fashionable congregation, which I watched with some curiosity, when, raising my eyes, I saw in the pew directly opposite to me in the gallery, on the other side, my husband, and beside him a slight, fair, elegantly-dressed young creature, covered with a large lace veil, and extremely bride-like in her appearance; other persons were with them, but I only saw those two. He saw me, too, for I perceived him start; but he turned his eyes resolutely away. I was obliged to sit out the service, for I could not withdraw. The sermon was preached by the cousin who had fetched my husband home, but I did not even feel surprised at the sight of him,—nor the least inclination to faint. I was in a state of *clairvoyance*, and I knew exactly all that had taken place. My husband never once looked towards me; but I could not withdraw my eyes from the young creature beside him.

"I recollect nothing that passed in the church, but I found myself walking tranquilly home; and Mrs. Rochester expatiating on the eloquent sermon of the Reverend Abraham Shuttlesworth.

"That afternoon the door of my sitting-room was thrown open.

"‘The master, ma’am,’ said Nanny. ‘and that other gentleman.’

"It was Maurice! and behind him his cousin. He looked stern and gloomy, as though he had endeavoured to nerve himself by ill temper for the ordeal that awaited him.

"‘In the name of Heaven when did you come here?’ was his first greeting.

“‘I came two days ago, because I wished to know what it is I have to look for, and how it is your pleasure to regard me.’

“The sight of that cousin with him made me tremble with rage, and quite choked any tenderness or relenting I might have otherwise felt. His eye fell beneath mine; if ever a man was to be pitied he was. The cousin took up the word, and in a hard, but affectedly conciliating voice, began to say that I must be aware that I could have no legal claim upon his lordship, as the Romish ceremony which passed between us did not even need annulling; it had, as I must have known, been null from the beginning; and he, as the representative of the rest of his lordship’s family, had come with him to beg I would retire and not bring distress to the noble and virtuous lady who had been kept in ignorance of my existence; and if I would undertake not to annoy his lordship, I might command any compensation in their power to bestow. He spoke as though he were in the pulpit, and began to wax eloquent, expatiating upon the noble and virtuous lady whose feelings were to be spared. ‘Will you desire this person to be silent,’ said I, addressing my husband, ‘and tell me yourself what it is you wish me to understand?’

“Maurice, who had writhed under every word that had been spoken, made an impatient gesture, and the reverend cousin retired to the window.

“‘I should not have brought him,’ said my husband, turning to me, but holding down his head, ‘only this interview required a witness for the sake of others. If you had remained at Naples, you would have spared both yourself and me much annoyance; if you had been patient only a short time longer, you would have received a communication which would have saved you the pain of this interview.’

“Strange as it may seem, at this crisis of hearing my fate, I felt cold and calm; never in my life before had I listened to my husband with so much indifference. ‘Perhaps as I am here, if you will tell me what there is to know, it will have saved much writing and postage.’

“Margaret, you were generous once. I am humiliated enough by your looks. I have set aside our marriage, and am legally married to another woman; you cannot set that marriage aside, but you may cause much pain to an innocent person, and it is for her sake I appeal to you. I was compelled to take the step I did; if I had remained in a private station, nothing would have induced me to forego a responsibility I had once accepted;—it was a case of “*noblesse oblige*.” You wilfully insisted upon having our marriage left incomplete when I would willingly have made it legal, because you said you would not be the means of marring my fortunes or embroiling me with my father. You insisted upon being generous and making a sacrifice; was it merely a make-believe piece of romance, or did you make an offer that you were willing should be accepted in case of necessity? When, by my brother’s death I became heir to the title, I found my father’s objections to my marriage with you stronger than ever; and strong they must have been to outweigh ordinary claims of honour. If you have been kept in ignorance until the fact was irrevocable, it was an error of judgment, only I wished to spare you as long as possible, and I own that I shrank from another scene like the one that preceded my departure. I thought you would suffer less when time had in some degree weaned your affection from me.’

“‘May I know the nature of your father’s insurmountable objections to me? I have never yet been told.’ My dear, I spoke this in the politest tone possible, though I was trembling with rage.

“He hesitated, and seemed not to wish to speak, but his cousin came to the rescue; there was an unctuous malice in his look, that showed he enjoyed having to tell me what I had asked.

“‘You must be aware, Madam, that there is an hereditary taint of insanity in your family; it was natural and praiseworthy that the Earl should, by every means, guard against its introduction, especially into what had become the chief male branch of his noble house.’

“I nearly sprang from my seat at hearing this. I had

only heard the fact very vaguely; I had been kept in ignorance of it, and I had never really believed it: it had never been presented to me as a reason why I should not marry as well as possible. To come to the positive knowledge of it at such a moment as this, and asserted in the coarse, cold-blooded manner I had heard it, was almost too much for me. I saw Maurice shrink at his cousin's speech as though he had been struck by a knife. However, I suppressed all sign of emotion; I was determined they should not think that *I* was mad; but the effort to keep calm seemed to turn me into stone, and I felt as though it was not I, but a strange voice speaking through me, when, after a moment I said, addressing my husband, 'But you knew it then as you do now, and yet you wished to marry me!'

"'Why will you recur to the past?' said he, impatiently; 'you know I loved you; that I would have plunged into a gulf of fire to obtain you. You were calm enough to calculate—to make a sacrifice to enable me to escape the consequences; but you are like all women—they like the excitement of being generous, but they expect to be repaid with usury. I tell you again, that if I had not succeeded to the title, I would not have used the power you left in my hands.'

"I kept resolutely silent; if I had attempted to speak, the tempest that was raging within me would have exploded; and I felt so helpless to give utterance to the indignation that nearly killed me. I was silent, because there were no words that seemed worth saying. He was evidently prepared for a violent scene, and did not know how to deal with me.

"He broke the silence at length by saying, with an attempt at familiar kindness,—

"'And now, Margaret, do not let us part in ill-humour: you are not lowered in my eyes by what has passed. I reverence and do justice to your many virtues; I have made every provision for your welfare, as I would for that of a sister. I have arranged for you to continue in the house where you have always resided in Naples, and have enabled you to continue the establish-

ment on the same footing : your personal comfort must ever be my first object.'

" 'I prefer making my own arrangements,' said I, quite distinctly, though very slowly, for my lips would scarcely form the words.

" 'But you will not leave me in ignorance of what you are going to do ; surely we may remain friends, if nothing more ?'

" That speech was no worse than all which had preceded it, and yet it stung me more bitterly ; it measured the depth of indifference to which he had fallen. But I had not gone through this interview so far to fail now ; I felt my strength giving way, and there was no time to be lost :—

" 'I will not have you for a friend henceforward. You have no concern with my life, nor I with yours. Keep your wife in ignorance of me ; she has done nothing to deserve to be made to suffer through me. And now that all is said, will you go ?'

" 'I rose in token of dismissing them. Maurice endeavoured to obtain some kinder token at parting ; he stretched out his hand, and would have taken mine ; but I stood motionless, and kept him off by my eye. To have felt my hand clasped in his, under such circumstances, would have killed me.

" 'Then, Madam,' said the cousin, holding his clerical hat in the act of departure, 'we have your promise that the noble lady in question shall not be disturbed by any act of yours ?'

" 'Yes,' replied I.

" They both passed through the door ; but before it had closed, Maurice came back. One step brought him to me : his face was working with violent emotion. He seized both my hands, which he wrung until the blood sprang from the pressure of my rings :—

" 'Hate me, Margaret, as much as you will ; but don't forgive me in that fashion. Tell me you will let me know what becomes of you.'

" 'No.'

"He dropped my hands, and I was alone—with all the devils that had entered into my soul.

"The proud composure I had maintained, was bitterly exacted from me in all the weakness and wild anarchy of passions which made my soul their field of strife.

"It would be neither for your good nor mine, were I to retrace the days and hours of frenzy and despair which were my portion. I can imagine the eternal place of torment to resemble it—nothing else.

"LOVE may be a strong passion, and I had loved with my whole heart, but HATRED now possessed me still more strongly; one can give utterance to one's love, but there is nothing adequate to express HATE. Acts of malice and revenge are infinitely beneath a genuine hatred; words are entirely worthless. Killing the object would be all too little, and yet to stamp it under our feet, to exterminate it, feels to be the only thing left one to do. Constance, pray to God that you may never know what hatred means. It will tear your heart and rend you, as devils are said to have done those they entered into of old, but it will lend you no strength. You will feel always impotent to satisfy the passion of a great revenge.

"I went abroad immediately, and travelled night and day for a week together. Then I rested for awhile in some remote village in Switzerland, the name of which I never knew; but the pause gave me up afresh to all the furies that possessed my soul, and again I continued my course. I was more like a wild animal than a woman.

"How long this state of stormy despair lasted, I cannot tell you; it seemed to me an eternity. Nanny never left me. She was a good angel, whom my madness could not drive away.

"It chanced that I had to remain in some mountain village for a day, there being no means of continuing my course. It rained heavily and continuously until towards evening, and then I went out of the inn to shake off the intolerable irritation and oppression of a day's confinement, by violent exercise. I walked at random,

and at length, coming down an unfrequented path, I came upon some steps rudely cut in the rock. I ascended them; they led to a small chapel erected in an angle of the rock. I entered; the place was nearly dark, being only lighted by the declining twilight, and the lamp which burned before the altar. At the first glance, the chapel appeared empty; but I soon perceived a group of children standing round the curé to be catechised. I sat down on a bench in the shadow where I could not be seen.

"The curé was a short, stout, good-natured looking man. He would have been decidedly vulgar if his countenance had not been redeemed by a pleasant, child-like smile, which made his little coarse features shine with a look that was quite beautiful.

"The catechism proceeded, and when it was ended, the old man took a little book out of his pocket, and prepared to read, moving at the same time nearer to the lamp for the sake of a better light. He then read the subject, 'On the forgiveness of injuries.' I laughed bitterly as I heard this; what should that innocent-looking old man, and those young children, know about either injuries or forgiveness?

"The storm in my heart, which had been for a brief while lulled, began to rise and gather afresh, like the awakening of Orestes' furies. I felt driven from the place to rush out into the gathering darkness. Whilst I was in the act of rising from my seat, one sentence detached itself from the reading, and attracted my attention. 'He, the Holy One, had given no cause, and had no self-reproach.' Like lightning flashing within me, I saw that all the bitterness of my own rage and hatred had come from the sense that it was my *own* actions that had been taken advantage of and turned against me, and that it was the sense of my own foolishness that made the sharpest sting in my heart. So soon as it struck me that some of the blame for all the misery and desolation that had fallen upon me rested with myself, and that I was in reality suffering the consequences of my own actions, I saw that I was in reality

indignant at having had my own wilfulness and imprudence taken advantage of and turned against me, without any recognition of the wild generosity and self-devotion which raised it, as I fancied, to the rank of heroism. The sudden relief I felt at this conviction was like that which might follow to a wretch just unbound from the rack, or to a struggling castaway who suddenly felt firm land beneath his feet.

"Now that I could take my own share of blame for the past, I was delivered from the horrible sense of injustice, against which I had so bitterly and so helplessly protested, and it was a strange comfort to take some of the blame to myself, instead of thinking that it all lay with *him*.

"I slept that night.

"My dear, if I were to say that the devil was cast out of me there and then; that henceforth I was peaceful and happy, and never more relapsed into storm and darkness, I should not be telling you the truth. It took years to enable me to forgive him without feeling either bitterness or contempt, for he had not acted with either justice or honour; but after that evening, I never again felt so entirely forsaken of God and man. It was my first step upwards into light. I remained in the village, and made friends with the old curé, and he was very good to me. After a while I told him my history. Certainly, he looked like the very last person in the world to choose for a confidant, for, not being a Catholic, it was not a case of confession. But I soon found how much he was my superior in all that constitutes wisdom. I have read somewhere 'that mysteries are revealed to the meek;' that old man was an instance of it. He had no worldly wisdom, and as for knowledge, reading and writing were the sum of his attainments, so far as I ever discovered; but there was a simple, spiritual element in his character, that completely lifted him out of the bewilderment of earthly passions, and gave him a keen, clear insight into the facts of things, that looked almost like inspiration. He was thoroughly kind-hearted and genial. I look back with great gratitude to that dear

old man. He never tried to make a Catholic of me, but seemed to find out by instinct what would be suitable occupation.

"I was rich, to his ideas, and he attached me to life, unconsciously to myself, by a hundred slender ties. After a little time, I found that I was no longer drifting about torn and bruised like an uprooted weed, but that I actually had found occupation and interest in that remote village where I had been thrown.

"At last, my dear good old friend died, and left me grieving for his death as I had never thought to have grieved about anything in this world again.

"His successor was a much cleverer man, better educated, and with more knowledge of the world. He was, I daresay, a good man enough, but he bored me dreadfully, and worried me with arguments to convert me to Catholicism. I soon grew wearied, and leaving a peasant and his wife in charge of my cottage, I again set off on my travels. I took up my abode for some months in a little hamlet in the valley of the Mont Blanc district, a village even more primitive than the one I had quitted.

"During my residence in this place, a curious incident came to pass. An Englishman and his sister, travelling too early in the season, met with an accident coming across the pass of the *Tête Noire*; it is a miracle how they were ever rescued. The lady was severely injured, and her brother was also hurt. Ours was the nearest village, and the guides brought them there. There was nothing but the rudest accommodation in the cottages, but mine possessed some comfort, and the sufferers were brought to me as a matter of course.

"Well, my dear, and whom do you imagine the travellers proved to be? Mr. Aubrey! that generous lover to whom you may remember I behaved so badly, and who was so much too good for me; of course there was a wonderful scene of surprise and recognition, but I was very glad to see him, for I had always instinctively thought of him as a friend. He abstained from the most distant question about my past—the marriage of Maurice had told him all there was to tell.

"He and his sister remained with me for two months before she was sufficiently recovered to travel. Although he did not question me, he made no concealment of what had been his own life since we parted. He had never married, but still preserved a romantic and chivalrous attachment to me.

"When his sister was well, and there remained no reason why they should not pursue their journey, he renewed his suit to me, and his sister pleaded his cause also. Of course, then, I told him everything.

"He behaved as nobly on this second occasion as on the first. I could neither love him nor marry him, but his noble affection was very precious to me; we contracted a strong, and on my side, a very grateful friendship, which continued to the end of his life. He died only a few years ago. This incident broke up my life amongst the mountains. I accompanied him and his sister on their further travels. They were anxious to take me with them to England, but I was not yet strong enough to go back there. I continued abroad, though in a less savage kind of life, and began to mix with my fellow-creatures, and kept up a correspondence with my English friend. At length his sister married, and left him to go to India. I was in hopes he, too, would marry, but he did not. At length I returned to live in England, and he gave me a cottage on an estate he possessed in Staffordshire, and was to me like a tender brother in all things: such an unselfish, untiring, unobtrusive self-devotion no woman ever received before. I lived in Staffordshire until your father asked me to come and live with him, to take charge of you, a little baby of a month old.

"It was a new spring of life to me. Do you wonder, my Constance, that I love you? or that I wish to save you from all that has made shipwreck of my own life? My child, you see now that all I preach to you, I have got out of the fire by my own experience.

"I have only one more incident to tell you, which rounds my life off where it began.

"Since we have lived down here, I have, as you know,

made periodical journeys to town. On one of these occasions, my dear old friend insisted that I should go with him to an Oratorio, where Madame Mara was to sing. We went. Seated a very little way from me, and in full view of me, was my husband! The first time we had seen each other since we parted that day. He looked so like what I remembered his father, that I could have believed it his ghost, except for the difference of dress. I felt no emotion at all at the sight of him. I had thoroughly worked out all there was to be felt towards him, both for love and hatred.

"It was not so with him. He found out where I was stopping, and two days after he appeared before me. He was now a widower, the father of sons and daughters married and dispersed from home, where he lived alone. His children had not been any comfort to him; he had been disappointed in his career as a politician. He was living joyless and solitary in the decline of life. He spoke with mournful tenderness of the past, and entreated me to allow him to repair the injury he had inflicted on me, to accept him once more for my husband, and that our life might close—as the best days of our youth had been passed—together.

"I felt very sorry for him, very, but I could not agree to his request. All the tenderness left in my nature was centred in you, my darling. I refused—my love for him had died out. I could not renew a connection which had once been so dear, and from which all life had departed."

Margaret was silent.

"And you might have been a Countess since you came to live here, aunt?" said Constance.

"Yes, my dear, if that would have been worth anything."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

From this time Constance began gradually to recover. The sullen silentness in which she had shrouded herself began to dissipate. Companionship in sorrow takes away its strangeness; it may not actually lighten the individual burden, but imagination goes for so much in all things, that when we see others called upon to endure similar griefs, the fear inspired by that which was a *strange* sorrow, is taken away, and it is at least reduced to its matter-of-fact proportions; we gain the courage not to sink under sufferings that others endure along with us, and have endured before us. Constance still remained as sad as death, and never expected that she would be otherwise; but, at least, she had come to recognise the fact, that she would be able to endure the sorrow that had been laid upon her. Her illness had, in this respect, been a great blessing; so much vague, mental misery had been carried off in bodily suffering. As her bodily strength increased, the dead weight of *ennui* grew heavier; her former employments had lost their meaning and their interest, and no object strong enough to engross her life or to employ it, broke through the dreary monotony of days that stretched out before her, flat and sunless. It is a weary fate to have all the hope and colour of life taken out of it so early, and nothing but the material of existence left intact. There is, however, a comfort that everybody is most

strangely unwilling to believe, which is, that sorrow is as evanescent as joy, and that if the best of things "holds its perfection but a little moment," the very saddest sorrow becomes absorbed into the general life. Nature protests against overmuch sorrow, and consoles her children in spite of their own wilfulness. Constance did not yet know this ; neither did she know the new duties that were awaiting her.

When she lay at the worst, an official letter had come from Messrs. Donaldson and Drew, solicitors, announcing poor Sydney Beacham's bequest, and requesting to be honoured by her further instructions. Margaret had replied to this letter, by intimating the serious illness that would for the present prevent her niece attending to business. Charles Herbert was still absent, and Constance was as yet ignorant of the fortune to which she had succeeded. Margaret was greatly perplexed how to break the fact to her. She feared the effect of the shock of such a tragedy in connection with herself. Whilst she was still hesitating, and waiting for some favourable opening, the matter was taken out of her hands, and decided for her in a very unlooked-for manner.

One morning, a letter sealed and edged with black, was brought in. It was signed Sarah Wilmot, and addressed to Margaret. It was to the effect, that having heard of the serious illness of Constance Herbert, she wished to hear how she was, feeling a deep interest in her, not only as having been commended to her by her nephew in the last hour of his life, but also as the daughter of one who had once been a dear friend of her own.

There was something in the tone of the letter that touched Margaret deeply, and by one of those impulses which are sometimes like inspirations, she wrote to beg that Miss Wilmot would come and see them ; she and Constance were alone. She said that Constance was still ignorant of the melancholy bequest that had come to her, and she dreaded telling her of it, unless Miss Wilmot would come and accept the trust which he who was gone had commended to her. Margaret felt quite

certain that the invitation would be accepted, and it did away with the painful perplexity with which she had considered this sinister dowry.

Constance had to be prepared to receive their expected guest; and she found, with something like surprise, that her interest in life was by no means extinct. The history of Miss Wilmot was a chapter of sorrow and trial, by the side of which her own grief looked very small indeed.

An answer came from Miss Wilmot, simply mentioning the day on which she might be expected to arrive.

Margaret was at the carriage door to receive her as she alighted. The deep crape veil was thrown back, and disclosed a face that had long ceased to be young; but there was a gentle, chastened expression of cheerful patience that gave it a beauty far beyond any personal loveliness; but it also was the evidence of many sorrows nobly borne. Margaret felt the tears spring into her eyes as she received her into her arms.

"You are come to be the good angel of this house," she whispered.

* * * * *

And now these three women were together. Each of them had had the hope of their lives struck down when they trusted most securely that it would endure. They each looked with an eye of the tenderest compassion upon the other, and they soon felt themselves bound together by an affection that was almost a passion. Constance discovered that Phillip had not called into exercise all her powers of affection. Miss Wilmot could sympathise with her, and was never weary of listening to her. Hearty, heart-felt sympathy is the luxury of friendship, not of love; and none of these three women had ever enjoyed it before. Margaret had learned to do without it, but even to her it was like a genial sunshine; and she rejoiced that such a friend as Miss Wilmot had been found by Constance, for she knew better than anyone the frail tenure of her own life.

A month passed away thus. Nothing in their external

circumstances had changed. But the dull, sunless gloom had passed away; they were strengthened to go on into life once more without being "weary through the greatness of the way." It is strange what comfort and strength distil from sorrow when it is accepted without bitterness of heart, and borne with patience that is not in haste to be delivered from it.

At the end of a month, Miss Wilmot proposed that they should go to Royton Swale, the property left to Constance by Sydney Beacham. "I cannot," said she, "bear the idea that dear Constance should feel as if she were going to take possession of Naboth's Vineyard. I wish her to have it with my blessing. I did not think I could ever have looked upon it again, and Constance has the idea that she can never go near the spot; if we all give way to morbid fancies, the place will go to desolation. The first sight of it will, no doubt, be very painful, but I think the sooner we get it over the better. There are, moreover, duties incumbent on all proprietorship, and they must not be sacrificed to scruples of delicacy."

Margaret thought the suggestion both kind and sensible, and the day for their journey to the north was decided upon. But before it came to pass, Miss Wilmot experienced one of those practical epigrams with which time endorses our most cherished illusions.

Charles Herbert was in the habit of going away and remaining absent several months together, without either writing or giving any indication of his abode; but he never returned to the Chantry without previously giving his aunt notice. She had made him understand that she greatly disliked being taken by surprise, and, at this time, she felt quite secure from a visit; she had been thinking how comfortably Miss Wilmot's prolonged visit had passed over. It was the evening before they were to set out for Yorkshire. They were gathered in the parlour round a wood fire, which the autumn evenings rendered very acceptable, when the clatter of a horse's hoofs was heard in the yard; to this they paid little attention, thinking that it was the farmer returned

from market. But there was a parleying in the passage outside, and in a moment more the door was flung open, and Charles Herbert stood amongst them! It was not yet dark, and the burning wood threw a strong light upon his face; his figure was still enveloped in a heavy riding cloak.

At first Charles did not perceive a stranger. He embraced Constance with great affection, held her at arm's length, and asked anxiously about her health; he had heard in London, for the first time, of her illness, and came down without rest or delay, to ascertain how she was. He hastily said this to his aunt in explanation of his abrupt entrance; and then he perceived, for the first time, the tall dark figure of Miss Wilmot, in her deep mourning. It needed not his aunt to tell him who she was,—he recognised her at once. They had not met since that evening when he broke off their marriage, nineteen years before.

Miss Wilmot had had the advantage of the last few minutes to regain her composure, and outwardly she was quite calm.

Charles Herbert was painfully embarrassed. He advanced a few steps, took the hand she held out to him, and glancing at her deep mourning dress, muttered a few words that were quite unintelligible. He could say nothing, he felt awkward and ashamed; he would have given all his winnings—and this time they were considerable—if the floor would have opened a trap-door for him.

He was conscious that it was through him that Miss Wilmot had been subject to the last heavy trial that had come upon her; but Miss Wilmot was not aware of all the details of her nephew's last career, and was ignorant of the sinister influence Charles Herbert had exercised over him; if Charles Herbert had been quite sure of this, he would have felt more at ease.

He sat down beside his aunt, and Miss Wilmot could, from where she sat, look unobserved upon the man whom she had once so deeply loved,—whose desertion had well

nigh cost her her life; and whom she had worshipped in the depths of her memory as the ideal of all that was fascinating and beautiful in man!

People who have once been lovers, and separated by some of the hindrances that ever beset true love, meeting again after a lapse of years, seldom feel the least enthusiasm for each other, incline rather to think each other very prosaic specimens of humanity. Miss Wilmot was startled and shocked at the change she saw in Charles. It was not that he had grown old, he was still only middle-aged, the change was in the whole expression of face and person;—it was like a well-remembered house with a strange inhabitant. The lines on his face were many; his forehead was creased and contracted over the brows; deep marks on each side of his mouth; his eyes were fatigued and dull, and an air of joyless, careworn dissipation pervaded his whole aspect; there was, however, an unmistakable refinement and gentlemanlike bearing, which was a redeeming grace. "The whirligig of time" had, indeed, brought its revenges.

The first impression produced upon Charles by Miss Wilmot's personal appearance was, that she had grown old; but before they had been a quarter-of-an-hour in each other's presence, the relationship that used to be between them was reversed.

She was disenchanted of the romance-worship which had made him her master, and in its stead, there arose the tenderest human pity for one so despairing and so wretched; whilst Charles felt as though he had come before a guardian angel whom he had resisted and ill-treated. He was filled with a confused remorse for the past; he felt what a poor, miserable, worthless creature he was, and that he was not fit to appear before her. The words of an old Scotch song came crooning through his memory like the voice of conscience.

"I'm lost to hope, I'm lost to grace,
I'm lost to all beneath the sun;
I lost my way in the light of day,
And the gates of heaven I'll never win."

The evening passed over silently and embarrassed enough, as was only to be expected. Constance was agitated, and wondering whether her father had seen Phillip; whether he knew anything of what had passed between them, and did not dare to ask a question. Margaret tried to talk on indifferent matters, but her sympathy with all that she knew must be in the minds of each of her companions, embarrassed her. Their journey had been fixed for the next day, and all had been prepared. Miss Wilmot herself told Charles the object of it, and it was another sharp pang of conscience to his heart. They offered to delay it, but that Charles would by no means allow; indeed, his only idea was to get away from them, and from himself, if possible. When they were about to separate for the night, Charles and Miss Wilmot stood accidentally by the side of each other for a few moments. Constance was away, and Margaret engaged at the other end of the room. Charles looked up in her face, and then, as though he spoke with pain, he blurted out the words, "Sarah, tell me you have forgiven me!"

"I never blamed you."

"Well, you had a good miss of me. You know what it all came to. I am glad you came here. Be good to Constance. Poor girl, she will need all the goodness she can get."

"I love her very much. Will you let her come to see me?"

"Surely; as much as you like."

He wrung her hand, and dropped it hastily, and turned away.

Margaret and Charles sat long together that night. Charles's heart was open, and he told his aunt more about the past than he had ever yet done. He told her of his own position with respect to Mr. Marchmont, and although it was only the confirmation of her own vague misgivings, still it was very painful, and awakened grave anxieties as to what would become of Constance when she herself should be taken away.

Charles received the communication about Phillip in sullen silence. It was only the fact of things which he had gloomily anticipated, when Constance was in her cradle; but now that it had actually come to pass, it seemed as though another fiend from the past had overtaken him. The consequences of an action sometimes dog a man's heels for years, but they surely fasten upon him at last.

As Charles spoke of being again absent for an indefinite time, Margaret felt obliged to speak of herself and of her own health, which had of late grown very precarious. Had Charles any future plans about Constance?

Charles had always vaguely intended, that when he had won money enough, he would leave off gambling, settle it all upon Constance, and come and live steadily at home with her. But of course that time shifted its horizon every year, and was as vague and distant now, as it had been at the beginning. He was startled and made uncomfortable by what his aunt told him, and "hoped that she was more anxious than there was any occasion for."

"My dear Charles, I am an old woman now, and must expect my change to come ere long. Will you promise me that when I am taken away, you will, for the sake of Constance, come and live with her, and give her a home, and the duties and occupations which make up a woman's life? Recollect she can have no hope of any other tie than yourself?"

"But I can never make Constance happy as she has been with you."

"That is not the question. You are her father, and have no right to ignore your responsibilities. Promise that, when I die, you will settle down and live beside her."

"Well, well, I promise. But I hope you will yet be spared for many years to come. I never saw you looking better in health than you do at this moment; and why should you not live to be eighty, as others do? I know

many persons much older than you are ; and the Countess of Desmond lived to be one hundred and ten. The chances are greatly in favour of your prolonged life. So do not anticipate evil."

Margaret smiled rather bitterly, but said no more.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE next morning early they set out upon their journey to Yorkshire. They expected to be some days upon the road, as they were to turn aside to show Constance Kenilworth and Warwick Castles, although neither of those places had as yet been promoted to more romance than their lawful history. They travelled in Miss Wilmot's coach, with four horses, as, in addition to themselves, there were Miss Wilmot's maid and old Nanny. The first day they met with no adventure. Highwaymen had not altogether vanished out of the sphere of possibilities, but they were infrequent, and they did not, at any rate, molest our travellers: but on the second day, when they were drawing near Warwick, the coach broke down. One of the wheels had come off. Nobody was hurt, and they were extricated with scarcely an alarm; but as it was a thinly-peopled part of the country, and no dwelling was in sight, there was nothing for it but to send one of the post-boys on to look for assistance, whilst they remained under the shade of a noble group of trees, with which that part of England is studded like one large park.

"Well," said Margaret, looking round, "here is a lovely evening—a beautiful pastoral scene—three distressed dames and their attendants—and not the glimpse of a deliverer in sight! If we were only in a novel,

such a concatenation would bring to pass an adventure ; as it is, I only hope we may 'find our welcome in an inn' before the night closes."

"I think we are always in a novel of some kind," said Miss Wilmot. "Effects follow causes every day of our life, only there is no one to write them down in their order, or to detach the critical event from all the unimportant ones which have preceded it. Only think how often the lady 'leaned over her embroidery' in the western tower, amongst her bower-maidens, before the cavalier, or the pilgrim, or the benighted horseman, as the case might be, rode up to the gate, to begin the romance !"

"Very true," said Margaret. "I never suspected you of knowing so much about novels."

"'The Mysteries of Udolpho' made me ashamed of myself. I nearly frightened myself to death over it, and the descriptions of scenery haunt me yet. I have never read any descriptions that produced so much of the emotion that the actual sight of the places would occasion."

"Well, I confess to having sat up night after night over 'Clarissa Harlowe.' I was dreadfully ill, and ought to have been in my bed. I could only procure one volume at a time, and I sat up, forgetting everything else in the world, until I had reached the last page, and then lived in a fever of impatience for the next. But no earthly consideration would make me open that book again. Even now, old as I am, I could cry to think of it. All the people, and all the places, in that book are so real to me, that I constantly find myself referring to them, as actual events in my experience."

"How very foolish one has been about books," said Miss Wilmot, "before one had real things to deal with. Sir Charles Grandison made a great impression on me. When I went to the dancing-school, there was one tall boy who used to dance the *Minuet de la Cour* with me. He was very handsome and well-mannered, and I used to think that Sir Charles Grandison must have been like him. He was older than I was, and looked to me, even

then, like a very fine gentleman. He left the school, and I have never seen nor heard anything of him since, nor met with anybody who knew him. He stands out in my recollection like a Chinese picture, quite unconnected with any reality. I have not thought of him for years."

"Have you not found," said Margaret, "that when a person or a thing occurs to you in this way, they are sure to cross your path again shortly? This happens to me so invariably, that I have got to consider it a rule, though the reason is far beyond me."

"That grave country gentleman coming along that lane, with the post-boy, cannot surely be he," said Constance; "it would be a singular coincidence if it were. I should then think that our coach must have broke down under some occult influence that had been commissioned to bring you together. Do look at him, and tell us."

"The resemblance is not striking at this distance, certainly. Edward Harrop did not look like that; and I do not think that Sir Charles Grandison could ever, by possibility, have grown so matter-of-fact in his appearance."

By this time the stranger was before them. He was a tall, grave-looking, and rather stout personage. He was dressed like a country gentleman of that day, and had evidently just returned from overlooking his men in the fields: he bowed to them in a formal, but not ungraceful manner, and said,—

"I understand, ladies, that you have met with an accident, and I esteem myself fortunate in having the opportunity of offering you hospitality until the damage to your carriage is repaired. My abode is not far from hence."

"But," said Margaret, smiling, "we are so large a company; with many thanks for your kindness, we must not trespass on you to such an extent."

"Pardon me, Madam," said the stranger, in a soft voice, and with a bow which reminded them all of Sir Charles. "You are at a greater distance from an inn than you are aware; it would be too far for you to

walk. I have ample accommodation for yourselves and your attendants, and you do not know the rare pleasure you would confer by your presence."

Margaret turned to her companions. Both of them seemed inclined to follow out the adventure that was opening upon them, and the result was, that they frankly accepted his offer. He thanked them with a grave cordiality that seemed to assert his sincerity, and gave the necessary directions to the post-boy to bring the broken carriage to his house, with a precision and conciseness that gave the whole affair the appearance of being the most natural occurrence in the world.

Walking, he offered his arm to Margaret with stately gallantry. Miss Wilmot, Constance, and the two maids followed respectively.

"Adventures seem very natural things when we are fairly in for them," said Constance. "I wonder where we are going; and yet wonder is too strong a term, for I do not feel in the least astonished."

"No more do I," replied Miss Wilmot; "and yet I ought to be, for, do you know, I am nearly certain that our host is Sir Charles Grandison of the dancing-school. The bow he made to your aunt came out of the *Minuet de la Cour*, as he used to perform it. I wish we could learn his name. It would scarcely be polite to ask him; but I hope he will tell us."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

At the end of about half a mile they arrived before a large, white, double-gabled house, covered all over with roses, and standing in a luxuriant, old-fashioned garden, with a broad gravel walk from the hall-porch, and a large, smooth, grass-plot on either side, which came close under the lattice windows. A row of fine elm-trees screened the house from the road. The sun had set, and a clear, transparent twilight gave a tranquil, mysterious aspect to the place, for not a leaf was stirring in the soft warm air.

The house door stood open. It was in a deep embrasure, and a passage, paved with bright red tiles, went directly through the house to a door opposite, which, being also open, gave a glimpse of a large farm-yard. Their host flung open the door of a large, low-roofed, old-fashioned sitting-room, where a bright wood fire was burning on the hearth; and, ushering them in, said, "You are welcome to Meriden Farm, ladies, and I am Edward Harrop, the farmer, at your service!"

"Did you ever live at Coventry? and did you ever go to Monsieur D'Egville's dancing school?" said Miss Wilmot, with animation.

"To be sure I did. But who, may I inquire, are you who ask me?"

"And you used to be the best dancer in the school, and

you were the model held up to all the rest in the *minuet* and the *gavotte* ; and one evening, at the half-yearly exhibition, before all the parents and friends, the string of your dancing-pumps came untied, and you stumbled and fell in the *pas grave* ? ”

“ I remember it well, though I do not look now as though I had ever learned to dance. Ah, I remember those days well,” said he, with a sigh ; “ but who, then, are you, who know me so well ? ”

“ Do you recollect Sarah Wilmot, who was made your partner because she was the right height ; whilst you wished to dance with Amelia Webster, a pretty little girl, with long, yellow, curling hair ? ”

“ And you are Sarah Wilmot ? and you knew *her* ? If I were glad to see you before, I am twice as glad now. You knew *her*, and can recollect what she was like in those days ? ”

He spoke with emotion, and quite lost the formal manner in which he had hitherto addressed them ; but the housekeeper, a sedate, middle-aged woman, with a close linen cap, bound by a broad ribbon round her head, and a buff handkerchief pinned down over her gown, came in at this moment, and the interruption threw him back into his old manner.

“ These ladies, Mrs. Dawes, are good enough to become my guests for some days ; I hope, and I trust to you to make them in all respects comfortable. If you will show them to their rooms, you can then come and see about our supper.”

Mrs. Dawes curtsied, and requested the ladies to follow her. She led the way up a broad, polished, old-fashioned staircase with heavy, twisted balusters. It might have been the most natural thing in the world for her master to find broken-down carriages and to bring the inmates home, so thoroughly prepared did the good woman appear for the contingency.

“ You will find all the beds well-aired, ladies, and the fires shall be lighted directly. The evenings are chilly in these old houses at this time of the year ; but my mistress, in her lifetime, always made it a rule to keep

all the beds ready for use at a moment's warning, and master keeps up her ways in all things."

"Is the mistress dead, then?"

"Yes, ma'am; she died about this time twelve months. Master took it much to heart. Is there anything you would like, or that I can send up for you?"

On being thanked, and her offer declined, she left them, to see about supper.

On descending to the parlour, they found the candles lighted, the curtains drawn, and the table set for the evening meal. At first, conversation was not brilliant—they had come mutually to the end of the topics which lay on the surface of their adventures, and they had not broken ground upon any topics of general interest.

Sir Charles Grandison, as Constance persisted in calling him, was not much accustomed to general society; and though hospitable in the extreme, he was at a loss to entertain his guests now that he had succeeded in housing them. The "half-hour" before supper was as difficult to manage as ever was the same period "before dinner."

At length Mrs. Dawes and a buxom, rosy maid-servant came in with the dishes. The supper was served in a primitive, homely fashion, that partook more of the rustic style of a farm-house than of the customs of genteel society.

A large cold round of beef, a dish of mashed potatoes, a brace of partridges, a hot apple pie, and some toasted cheese, with brown bread, ale, and cider, was a tolerably substantial repast to set before three ladies.

The duty of presiding at the supper-table appeared to restore their host to his self-possession. He told them, in reply to a question, hazarded by Margaret, about his crops, the price of grain, and many other country-gentlemanlike topics, and appeared to address his conversation chiefly to her; but it was evident all along that he wished to say something else, which he could not bring in. After supper he relapsed into his embarrassed formality, and they were beginning to long inexpressibly for their beds, when Mr. Harrop, who had sat

trying to make up his mind to say something, turned abruptly to Miss Wilmot, and asked her to come and look at a picture which hung at the other end of the room. She complied. "Do you recollect anyone like that?" he asked. It was the portrait of a young and very pretty woman, of the decidedly English type; flaxen hair, blue eyes, and wild-rose complexion. She was dressed in the height of a bygone fashion.

Miss Wilmot shook her head.

"That was Amelia Webster, my wife," said he, in a hurried tone, "taken just before our marriage; but she was prettier than that, by far."

He stopped suddenly, and seemed nervous at having said so much.

Miss Wilmot spoke with interest of her, and of what she was as a little girl at the dancing-school.

Mr. Harrop began an earnest conversation with her. Constance took refuge in some odd volumes of the *Town and Country Magazine*, which were full of old fashions and defunct scandal. Margaret, from time to time, looked at the prints as Constance appealed to her, but their host seemed engrossed with Miss Wilmot.

At last, the evening came to an end, and they were allowed to retire.

"What has our silent host found to talk about?" cried Constance.

"About his wife, my dear; nothing else, I assure you. I knew her as a young girl."

The next day Mr Harrop took them to see Kenilworth, which was not far off, and his formality began to disappear. Constance even found him agreeable. Their coach was not yet repaired, and their host protested against all idea of their departure. He persuaded Miss Wilmot and Constance to take a long walk with him, in the afternoon, round his farm. He addressed most of his conversation to Miss Wilmot, and pointed out to her everything that needed to be admired and recognised, giving her at every point some anecdote of his departed wife. Miss Wilmot listened kindly, but inwardly wondered at the change time had made in her old dancing

partner. He kept them with him for three days; towards the end of that time he had brightened up considerably; they all felt quite at their ease with him, and found their visit extremely pleasant. They were sorry to part from him, and gave him a most cordial invitation to visit them as soon as he could make a holiday. Mr. Harrop's embarrassment returned upon him—he said he should be happy, most happy; but, as he handed Miss Wilmot to the carriage, he held her hand, and said, in a confused manner:—

“If I am invited, do *you* say that I may come?”

“Certainly,” replied she; “I am sure we shall all be disappointed if you do not.”

“Well, then, I *will* come; you may trust me.”

He wrung her hand with emphasis, colouring to the roots of his hair; he then took leave of the others, and walked beside the coach window until they reached the high road.

“Good-bye, Mr. Harrop,” cried Constance; “we shall send you a summons as soon as over we are settled at Royton.”

The remainder of the journey passed without further accident or adventure of any kind, and towards the conclusion of the third day after leaving Mr. Harrop's house, they arrived at the end of their journey.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WE are all of us frequently deceived in our fears as in our hopes. Miss Wilmot had dreaded inexpressibly the first return to Royton. When her nephew, in whom she had garnered so many hopes, had been taken away, and under terrible circumstances, which had seemed to destroy the whole of what future still remained before her, and to leave it desolate, barren, as though sown with salt, and incapable of again producing the smallest object worth living for,—she had thought at first, in her heavy sorrow, that she would see Constance, and give her the heritage that had fallen to her lot, to save her all pain or scruple; and that done, retire, and sit down desolate and sad, enduring with what patience she might.

But in following that impulse of delicate kindness, she had touched an unsuspected spring, and thrown open the entrance to a new phase of life; a life fertile in new works and days. She had found in Margaret a tender friend, who could comprehend all she had suffered and surmounted; who herself had learned still deeper secrets of sorrow,

In Constance she had found a younger sister, who needed all the care and affection she could bestow, all the strength that may be given through example. From

them she had received such companionship and sympathy as she had never dreamed of; and, as though it were destined that nothing should be needed in this new life, the old hero of her girlish days had come before her, and humbly offered himself for her acceptance.

It was uncertain yet, even to herself, whether she could accept the part thus laid before her, but there was not the least doubt that if she did, all who came beneath her influence would have reason to rejoice. The only real desolation of life is when we are needed by no one, and live moral paupers on the hands of others. Nature is a tender mother; she never did betray the heart that trusted her; and if we will only not cling to our vain regrets, as though they were our idols; if only we will not poison our grief by our own passionate self-love, clinging to our sorrows as though they were idols, she will always heal and strengthen us, even out of the sorrow itself. We "shall be heard in that we fear."

Of course, it was not without a natural pang that Miss Wilmot passed the threshold. The servants, who had served and recollected the old family, were at the door to receive her. They had heard vaguely of the manner of their young master's death; but in those days, neither news nor scandal travelled as it does now. They believed he had died in a brain fever, and that Constance would have been his wife had he lived. They were prepared to yield her homage as their lawful mistress, and were overflowing with sympathy towards her. A grey-headed gardener; an erect, stately old woman, who had lived with Sydney's mother without wages, after her misfortunes; her daughter, who did the house-work; a young boy, her nephew, who was a servant-of-all-work, completed the modest establishment.

"This is your new mistress," said Miss Wilmot, presenting Constance to them. "She stands to me in the stead of him who is gone."

"Bless her bonny face; she would have made him a rare wife," said the old man, whilst Mrs. Johnstone

sighed, and shook her head; for women of her class enjoy an emotion, even though it is painful.

Miss Wilmot hurried Constance and Margaret into the comfortable parlour, with its crimson paper, hung round with book-shelves and choice prints.

"This is your new home, my dear; and God bless you in it," said Miss Wilmot, kissing her tenderly.

But after that she made her escape to her own room. She had need to be alone, to control all the emotions that were tumultuously asserting themselves.

Margaret and Constance were bewildered. All was real and substantial round them; yet they seemed to themselves in a dream.

Mrs. Johnstone came to ask them if they would go to their rooms, and conducted them up a broad, old-fashioned staircase, where the boards were scoured as white as curd, into a large, cheerful bed-room. A wood fire was burning on the hearth, which was inlaid, and all round the chimney, as high as the mantel-piece, with quaint Dutch tiles. Everything was luxuriously clean; but the furniture was homely, plain, birch-wood, polished like a looking-glass; and the carpet was scanty, and did not conceal the white fir boards of the floor. It was furnished in the fashion of a bygone time, but which still lingers in the north,—an honest, wholesome thrift, everything sufficient of its kind, but nothing for show. The bed was hung with white dimity, and the window-curtains were the same. The window looked towards the road by which they had approached the house. The river could be seen at intervals winding through the valley; then came a wild track of moorland country, and the hills beyond, with plantations of fir-trees here and there. It was quite a different scene to anything Constance had ever beheld. The very colour of the sky seemed different, and the clouds cast a shadow upon the hills as they sailed along the sky.

- "Oh, aunt, look, how beautiful!"

"It reminds me of my cottage amongst the mountains. I am glad you will live amongst the hills; there is something noble and heroic in the air we breathe

upon the mountains," said Margaret. "What part of the country is this?" said she, turning to the old woman.

"That is Blackstone Edge that you see before you; the 'Back-bone of England,' as I have heard it called. The young lady must go about and see the places in the neighbourhood. There will be nothing like it where you come from, I reckon."

"No; the country with us is rather flat," said Margaret, smiling, "but it is much greener and more fertile, and we have more trees."

"Ah! well, for those who like them, fields and trees may do; but I like the hills. I am used to them all my life. I once went with Madam Beacham to a flat country, and I felt as though I had come down in the world like. But won't you come away to your own room, it is close to this. Miss Wilmot chose it for you herself, and wrote word you were to have it?"

She led the way along a short passage. Two rooms opening into each other, with a warm aspect, had been fitted up, one as a sitting-room, and the other as a bedroom, and hither all Margaret's own personalities had been transported, and already old Nanny had arranged it as nearly as she could into the resemblance of her mistress's rooms at the Chauntry. It had been a friendly plot between herself and Miss Wilmot, into which even Constance had not been admitted.

Margaret was as much surprised and pleased as either of them could desire, and it was a greater addition to her comfort than they suspected. The objects were all associated with events in her past life, and she regarded them as household gods of which she did not willingly lose sight.

By this time it had become quite dusk, and Miss Wilmot came to seek them, to go down to tea. She spoke quite cheerfully; but when they came down stairs into the light, her eyes looked heavy with recent tears.

Mrs. Johnstone had exerted herself to provide a

plentiful Yorkshire tea, combining all the best features of dinner, tea, and supper rolled into one. The wood fire was piled up with logs, which were blazing and cracking like fireworks. The curtains were drawn and the candles lighted. There was an atmosphere of cheerful, glowing comfort that no heart could resist, and in spite of destiny and dark clouds, and all their stock of sorrows, their spirits rose, and they were very happy. After the tea had been removed, they drew round the fire, and talked over their journey and their adventure, and Mr. Edward Harrop, and their curious improvised visit to him; and Miss Wilmot confided to them what he had said to her at parting.

The best of women, and those who are the least of gossips, dearly enjoy drawing inferences from a communication of this kind; it is a source of speculation that never fails to stimulate their interest. They all, in their hearts, love match-making; it is an instinct that is born with them, and they cannot help it. Both Margaret and Constance felt themselves instinctively contemplating possibilities which they had not dreamed of an hour before; they would not have confessed such a thing, but he immediately rose in their estimation, and they canvassed his good gifts with a far more definite interest than before.

So passed over the first evening that Constance spent under her own roof. At ten o'clock, Miss Wilmot said that Mrs. Johnstone always read prayers to the household, but she was hoping that the mistress would take it on herself. Constance looked confused.

"Oh, yes, by all means, if you will read."

"No, my dear, you are the mistress; your aunt and I are your guests. You must fill your own place. Shall I ring?"

"If you think it right, yes. I will do it, for, indeed, I feel the need to be thankful."

The household assembled, and Constance, with some shrinking at first, but gathering courage as she proceeded, read aloud the portions appointed for the evening worship, and she prayed in her heart that she might

have strength and wisdom to act aright in her new sphere.

The next morning brought business. Constance had to become acquainted with her property, and the duties it would entail upon her. She had not come to sit down as a fine lady in a well-ordered household ; there was much to be done and to be seen to. Plenty of occupation and new interests opened out before her.

"I am very glad that I am alive, and that I was not taken at my word when I was so miserable," said she, to her aunt, when they were alone that evening. "I never expected to feel so content to live. It seems like morning come after a dark night, which one had never expected would pass away."

"My dear child, when you are tempted again to despair, recollect the infinite possibilities that lie concealed in life. Wait patiently—wait, and it will always in good time be shown you that there is something to be done. You never know what the most apparently trivial incident carries within it. If we knew everything, we should be patient as a matter of wisdom ; as we know nothing, we must be patient in our ignorance, and trust in Him 'who beholds all things.'"

So time passed on. A letter came in about a month from Mr. Harrop, hoping they had reached home safely, and modestly requesting that he might receive some tidings of them.

"My dear Constance, we have been very remiss all this time. How is it that we have never written to him ?"

"Because, aunt, we have been so busy, and we have been waiting to fix a time for him to come and see us. But now I will write to-day, and tell him I want him to advise me about the farm, and I am sure he will come."

"But where can he stop ?" asked Miss Wilmot ; "there is not a cottage within a mile of this."

"Oh," said Margaret, laughing, "we are not going to

incur the remorse of Uncle and Aunt Selby, by sending out Sir Charles Grandison to an inn. He will come here, of course."

So Constance wrote that very day, begging him to come and see them very soon.

CHAPTER XL.

MR. EDWARD HARROP did not need to be invited twice ; he had, in truth, ever since the departure of his guests, been casting about in his mind for a good excuse to avail himself of the wish they had expressed at parting, that he should some time go to see them ; but he did not exactly see how he was to bring the cordial generality into a specific time. Since they had left him, his home had seemed more lonely than ever, more lonely than he could endure. He had not any longer the sharp vehemence of his grief to occupy him. Passionately attached as he had been to his wife, he at first believed that if he might live alone, and have no intruders upon his solitary misery, it would be all there was left to desire in this world. But in the twelve months that had elapsed, Time had done its never-failing work ; the sharp sting of sorrow was blunted, and it was no longer his companion, filling his mind and occupying all his feelings. He began to feel very dull : he endeavoured to occupy himself by reading and his ordinary farming avocations, but those did not dissipate the intense *ennui* that was weighing him down ; the deep depression, which was like grief with all that was spiritual and noble in it evaporated.

When accident brought Miss Wilmot under his roof, he believed that he saw in her the only woman in the

world worthy to replace his lost Amelia. She had known her long ago. She was associated with his own youth; and she was, on her own account, a most excellent and agreeable woman. It did not require all this combination of happy concurrences to make him think a great deal about her, and to cause a sentiment that, if it were not Love, was at any rate a strong pre-occupation in his mind, which became more and more pronounced every day. When the letter which Constance had written, announcing their safe arrival and settling down at Royton Hall, arrived, asking him to fix his own time for fulfilling his promise to visit them, he did not delay to write an answer, but desired his housekeeper to pack his saddle bags, and, mounting his horse, started within two hours after the receipt of the letter.

Of course he had plenty of excellent reasons for so much dispatch; he was not impatient—not at all; it was never his character to be impatient, but it was a slack time; he could very well be spared from the farm just then, and in a week or so there would be no telling when he could get away; besides, he wished to go through Sheffield, where he could meet with some improved agricultural implement which had just been brought out; he should have plenty of time; and *besides*,—that word “besides” is a sunken rock in the sea of reason; more good arguments are stranded upon it than on all the specious sophisms that endanger poor mortal ideas. “Besides,” no women, and very few men, find their logic strong enough to tide them handsomely over that point in an argument—a good reason is seldom found after a “besides.” Mr. Edward Harrop spurred his horse when he came to “besides,” and did not look closely to see where it led.

As he proceeded on his journey, he decided to make the best of his way at once to the far end, and to take Sheffield on his return. There was no harm in this at all. If any accident should occur, it would, as he justly reflected, be better to lose his visit to that place than to

lose Royton Hall. Accordingly, he made the very best of his way ; the journey was upwards of a hundred miles, and the roads, on the latter part of the way, rough and hilly, but his horse was strong, and made to exert himself, so that he took no more than three days before he alighted at Royton Hall.

The inmates were all taken by surprise at such a speedy following up of their invitation. The holiday, the change of scene, the hopes that he could not help entertaining, had all conspired to brighten his spirits ; and he looked so much younger and more buoyant, that when they saw him, they were all tempted to think they had made their first acquaintance with him under some disguise. Margaret laughed outright to think of the sad-looking, formal, middle-aged gentleman she had been expecting ; Constance wanted confidence when she reflected upon the free off-hand style of invitation she had written to him ; and Miss Wilmot was quite confounded, at the precipitate course things seemed to be taking. However, they were all glad to see him, and received him with so much cordiality, that he was quite rescued from the misgiving that had seized him as he came in sight of the Hall.

He soon became quite at home amongst them. He was a gentleman and a man of cultivated mind, but had lived so long alone, that he had almost forgotten the pleasure of social intercourse, and almost needed to learn to speak ; but that soon came back to him, and it was a pleasure he relished all the more keenly for its long suspension. He was delighted to find that Constance needed his advice in farming matters ; it took off, as he fondly imagined, all awkward particularity from his visit ; for he had grown as shy before Miss Wilmot as if he had been a young boy. The truth was, that the good man had fallen honestly and genuinely in love with her, in spite of all his previously fixed ideas that his heart was quite dead and buried in the grave of his lost wife.

As to Miss Wilmot, she had led such a nun-like state of existence for so many years, that she was at first

startled, not to say frightened, at tacitly keeping on her acquaintance with a man who was so particular in his attentions to her, and whom she believed she never would or could encourage. Mr. Harrop, the very day after his arrival, had had the good instinct to make Margaret the *confidante* of what he hoped and desired, and he had the good sense to follow her counsel; hence it came to pass that poor innocent Miss Wilmot never had the chance of *discouraging* him.

Meanwhile, he became quite domesticated amongst them. Constance declared he was just like a relation, and Margaret cautiously expressed her very favourable opinion of him. Underneath his formal manner there was so much genuine kindness of heart, such an affectionate, child-like disposition, that no one could help becoming attached to him as they came to know him. He remained with them for ten days, which was equivalent to a twelvemonths' ordinary acquaintance; but Miss Wilmot having, as we have seen, got a fixed idea that she could never marry, did not in the least suspect that any treacherous melting of her resolution was in progress, or, indeed, that it was kept in shape by nothing but the varnish of consistency, with which women especially try to strengthen their mind whenever they "make it up;" but which, somehow or other, generally melts off into very fantastic shapes.

The last morning of his visit, when he could prolong his stay no longer, he resolved once more to try his fate at her hands. Margaret contrived that he should have an opportunity of speaking to her alone; but she warned him not to be too sanguine, nor yet to lose heart if she at present refused to listen to him; a *juste milieu* which human nature in general, and the human nature of lovers especially, finds it peculiarly easy to hit!

He began by speaking of his late wife, and told her it was an attachment that began when they were boy and girl at the dancing-school. He told her what a good woman she was, and spoke of his affection for her in a manly, straightforward manner. He spoke with a

genuine feeling that was almost eloquent, and made him quite forget his embarrassment. He could not have taken a better plan for making a good impression on Miss Wilmot; it interested her in his story; and when he went on to tell her how lonely and miserable he had lived since her death, she grew quite pitiful for him; and when he told her that she was the only woman he had ever seen besides whom he even desired to marry, and told her how very lonely the house had been since her departure, he made such an appeal to her charity and benevolence, that she became moved, and began to fancy that it was in some sort a moral obligation laid upon her not to refuse to be what consolation she could to him.

The surest appeal to any woman who is essentially good-natured, is to set before her what is desired in the light of a *good deed*; any personal advantage would, in all probability, take no effect; but, clothed in the shining radiance of a good deed, she will give her consent, and not examine too closely whether it be Satan transformed into an angel of light. In fact, very kind-hearted people cannot in the nature of things be strictly logical either in their deeds or their ideas.

Miss Wilmot could not, however, be brought all at once to agree to such a wholesale piece of magnanimity as to marry a man for the sole sake of making him happy; but she had begun to pity him very sincerely, and to sympathise with him in the picture he had drawn of his loneliness; and that was a great deal gained. He had the sense to press for nothing further at present, but took his leave, declaring that the past week had been "a bright oasis in his life," which struck Miss Wilmot as very touching and poetical, although it can scarcely be called original; but it touched her as coming from him.

After his departure, things returned to their ordinary course. Mr. Harrop wrote frequently. Sometimes it was to Constance, a letter full of farming counsels, and shrewd country-gentlemanly advice on different matters connected with landed interests; at other times it would

be a letter to Margaret, containing touching details about his personal proceedings,—all cunningly intended to be communicated to Miss Wilmot. Once or twice he wrote to her direct, making the excuse about the condition of the cottages on his estate, and asking her to draw some plans and elevations, both for cottages and a school-house, for Miss Wilmot had a special talent that way.

By these means he contrived to keep himself fresh in their memory; and the week was considered on both sides very barren in interest which did not bring at least one long letter, written as letters used to be when they cost money, full from end to end, and closely packed. During the winter, the heavy snow-storms made the roads impassable, and the communication was interrupted for a week together; but the letters were always written and when the thaw came, they arrived in a flock, none the worse for their detention.

The only incident worth recording that occurred during this winter, was the serious illness of Margaret. She caught a violent cold, which ended in bronchitis, and she had to confine herself entirely to her room until the spring set in. Although the immediate danger passed over, the ensuing spring saw Margaret much broken in strength, and needing the greatest care and precaution. She herself knew the precarious tenure by which she held her life; but her companions were sanguine, and hoped everything from the warm weather. The doctor said that she must not pass another winter so far north, and Margaret did not think it likely that she ever should.

The only allusion, however, which she made to herself, was one day, when alone with Miss Wilmot she said,—

“If you were married, it would be a great anxiety to my mind as regards Constance. She will need some friend to stand by her like a relation. Her own father will never undertake his proper relationship towards her: he has not the strength of character to be her guardian. I never saw a man so morally gone to wreck.”

"He used to be so different," said Miss Wilmot, with a sigh. "I hope you will be long spared to Constance; what would become of her without you, I do not know."

"Do not give way to idle hopes," said Margaret, abruptly; "my life I know not to be worth an hour's purchase. But now, tell me truly, are you clinging to the ghost of constancy; and, because you were once disappointed, do you still believe that Charles Herbert is the only man the world contains worthy of your love?"

"My dear friend, when that heavy sorrow came upon me, I believed sincerely that I could never love any other man. I did not blame him for an instant for the part he acted. I did not see that either he or I could do otherwise; and I felt glad to think that, by setting him free, cheerfully and readily, I proved my love for him in a manner he could never doubt, and I pleased myself with thinking that he must recognise it. I should be ashamed to tell you how completely I lived upon the idea that he would always think of me as one who loved him well, and I thought I would always be constant to him. Other interests and duties arose in life, and this strong idolatry to him did not die, but fell into abeyance. No other attachment of a similar nature took its place, but I was taught to be content.

"I will not speak of him who is gone. I loved him as though he had been my child. When he was taken away, I murmured, 'my punishment was greater than I could bear'—and 'what had I done to deserve so heavy a stroke to be laid on me?' I was mad and rebellious; but, thank God, a better spirit was put within me, and then I found you and dear, dear Constance. Oh, you do not know all that you have both been to me! And then, that no shadow of regret, of discontent, might be left to linger in my mind, I saw Charles Herbert again. I was frightened at the difference between the object I had been obstinately regretting, and for the loss of whom I had secretly felt that I had been magnanimous in not

repining, and the real Charles Herbert as he stood there before me!

"Do you know, that night, when I reached my own room, I kneeled down, and thanked God with all my heart that He had kept me from my own desires. I never felt so thankful at any moment of my life as I did then for the heaviest trial that had ever befallen me!

"Well, and now tell me, how do you feel disposed to poor Edward Harrop?"

"I am not in love with him—not as I was with Charles Herbert; but I have a strong regard for him, and could like to have him always for my companion. I could rely upon him entirely, and I feel very grateful to him for his partiality; and if he still thinks that it would make him happy to have me for his wife, I do not think I should wish to refuse him."

"Capital!" cried Margaret, laughing; "he ought to go down on his knees to thank you. He must be very *exigeant* if he requires more. Dear friend, I wish you could know all the happiness it gives me to think that you, whose nature is so richly endowed with all the qualities that would make a perfect wife and mother, at last have a chance of fulfilling your vocation! Now I will tell you a secret, for surprises are bad for the nerves: Edward Harrop will be here the day after to-morrow, to learn his fate from your own lips. Here, read what he says in his last letter to me."

"I can live on hope no longer; the glimpse of happiness that might still be mine bewilders and unsettles me. I must know the ground I stand upon: the hardest reality is better than the loveliest dream."

"So, my dear, put on your considering cap, and do not drive a worthy man to despair, unless you feel it a very imperative duty."

Mr. Harrop did not fail to arrive. Absence had made him more in love than ever. It had given a touch of imagination to his sentiment, which had

beautified even Miss Wilmot. At the end of three days he had another private conversation with her, which came about by the merest accident. She and Constance were in the garden ; and when Mr. Harrop joined them, Constance left them to give her aunt some melted jelly, which she always took at that hour, and Mr. Harrop so far profited by the opportunity to plead in his own behalf, that when, an hour afterwards, she entered Margaret's room, she burst into tears, and told her she had accepted him !

But she seemed very happy, notwithstanding. Constance was delighted : and as to Mr. Harrop, everybody wondered how they could have fancied him a grave, elderly gentleman ! Miss Wilmot said he looked like what she recollected him five-and-twenty years ago !

CHAPTER XLI.

It was settled that the wedding should take place in June, at the residence of Miss Wilmot's uncle. Mr. Edward Harrop pleaded hard to be married during this visit, and to take his wife home with him ; but to this, neither Miss Wilmot, nor Margaret, nor Constance would listen for a moment, and he considered himself an ill-used man ; but as all men are unreasonable,—it is their normal state,—a man in love cannot be expected to be otherwise.

It is an old story that “much would have more,” and the Ginn in the “Arabian Nights,” who, on being let out of the small bottle in which he had been imprisoned, spread himself out over unlimited space, must have been the Genius of human wishes. But as it is far too late in the day to hope to make any observations which shall be original on such a subject, we will merely relate that Mr. Harrop at length took his departure, with the consoling reflection that the fourth of June *must* arrive at its usual time.

At the beginning of April there was a week of charming spring weather, and our three friends commenced their journey to London by easy stages. Margaret was very anxious to be near her own physician ; she had fears, which she kept to herself, lest she might not live until the marriage took place. However, the journey

seemed to agree with her, and she appeared to rally when they were settled once more in London. Constance felt the breaking-up of the constant companionship there had been with Miss Wilmot, who returned to her uncle's residence, and the shadow of her own sorrow again fell upon her; but she struggled bravely not to seem sad, and the weight that was in her heart lay out of sight. No tidings had reached her of Phillip, except that once her father, in one of his letters, mentioned that Mr. Marchmont was still in Paris, and that his son was travelling.

Charles Herbert's letters were few and far between, and their details of his proceedings were always of the vaguest kind. His last letter had been dated from Vienna; he spoke of having been ill, and of his intention to try the baths of Marienbad. This now was eight months ago, and both Margaret and Constance had begun to feel anxious for further intelligence of him, but they had no means of writing, as he had neglected to give them any address, and their last letter, written on a venture to Vienna, had come back with the intimation that Mr. Herbert was not there.

"I would like to go and visit poor mamma, again," said Constance, about a week after they were in London. "I have been thinking that I should like to take her to live with us at Royton. I would take care of her. I cannot bear the thought that she should be living apart from everybody, as though she were a leper. It would do me good to have her with me; I should then feel as if I had some positive duty to engage me; the things one does of one's own accord, do not occupy one like the duties which are laid upon us by Providence, and surely I have duties towards my mother."

"We will consider about it. If your father were to return to live at home, your first duty would be towards him; and he could never bear the constant sight of your mother, in her present state. She is, happily for her, entirely unconscious of her situation; she is well cared for, and I doubt whether it would be well for you to have the spectacle of her infirmity before you constantly. If

ever it should become necessary for you to take her to live with you, be sure that it will make itself apparent and unquestionable. Go to see her, but let us wait before we make any change."

Constance went that day to see her mother, and returned to her again and again.

She felt remorse for the indifference in which she had lived for so many years, as to whether she had a mother or not; and now her heart was full of intense pity for her; it was more like a sentiment of maternity than the feeling of a daughter towards her mother. Also, she felt that it strengthened her own heart against vain regrets for the course she had taken. When she looked upon her mother, she realized the inexorable necessity by which her own life was controlled, and grew calm before it.

It is the restless drifting to and fro, the beating about amongst hopes and fears, and wild possibilities of things being otherwise, that makes sorrow maddening; once convinced that *we*, at least, have only one thing to do, which is to submit, we cease to break ourselves against sharp regret. It is wonderful (and is true, morally as well as physically) what an immense weight we may support without being crushed, if it only continues—still.

Her anxiety about her aunt gave her infinitely more pain than any other feature in her destiny, not that she would have owned to herself that she was seriously alarmed, she hoped; but hope is only another phase of fear, and the possibility of failure is always the most vivid part of the sentiment.

Meanwhile, there were preparations to be made for Miss Wilmot's marriage. A certain amount of sewing and new clothes seems to be indispensable to a lawful marriage. Constance entered into the business heartily; and though Miss Wilmot could not fail to look back to the time when she was preparing for a similar event, still it was with no morbid sentiment, but a genuine thankfulness that she had not had the choosing of her own lot in life, and with confidence "and patient cheer,"

she entered upon the new sphere that had opened before her.

Mr. Harrop arrived in London some days before the one appointed for the marriage, and was the guest of Margaret and Constance. Constance was to be Miss Wilmot's bridesmaid, and Margaret was to be present at the ceremony. Mr. Harrop had brought a friend with him whose father Margaret had known in her youthful days.

At last the fourth of June actually arrived,—a lovely summer day,—and Miss Wilmot, in her bridal-dress of silver-grey satin and quaker-like bonnet; her sweet, tranquil face nearly as handsome, if not so brilliant, as she had been nineteen years before. She was now only eight-and-thirty, a time of life when women still have pretensions to be the heroines of novels, although it may be a somewhat mature age to be married.

Constance looked very lovely in white India muslin. The bridegroom (we are sorry to record such an unbecoming fact, but it was the rigorous costume of the day) wore a blue coat with gold buttons, and a face that looked irresistibly happy. Miss Wilmot's uncle was too old and too infirm to go to church, so an old friend of the family acted in his stead.

After the ceremony there was a breakfast. They were all very quiet and silent, but no tears were shed, except by the poor old uncle, who confounded this marriage with the one that was formerly to have taken place, and called Mr. Harrop, Mr. Herbert; but those present were too thoroughly contented with the present state of things to be in the least disconcerted by the mistake.

At length the breakfast was over; the bride had put on her travelling-dress, and the carriage was at the door to take her away.

"Good-bye, dear Constance. Remember you are to follow us in a month. I shall not give you a day's grace, but shall send Edward out to look for you."

"God bless you, my dear child," said Margaret, holding both her hands; adding, in a low voice, "Be a mother to Constance when I am taken away."

"I consider Constance like my own sister," said Edward Harrop, "and she shall never want a brother so long as I live."

Margaret bowed her head; she could not trust her voice to speak. Constance did not hear what was passing—she was taking leave of the little dog that was to go along with his mistress to her new home.

At last the carriage drove away, and in a few minutes afterwards, Margaret, Constance, and Mr. Dellincourt, the groomsmen, set off on their return home.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE afterpart of a wedding-day is always melancholy; there is an inevitable collapse from which the best-regulated minds cannot rally for at least twenty-four hours.

"What shall we do with ourselves?" cried Constance. "Our ordinary employments look quite dingy. I suppose I am not in the vein to set about anything."

"Let us go to the theatre and see Young," said Mr. Dellincourt; "though it certainly is an ominous play,—'The Stranger.'"

"I am not afraid of omens for our friends," said Constance, gaily; "and I have never seen Young, yet. Do let us go, dear aunt."

"You may go with Mr. Dellincourt, with all my heart; but I am not equal to accompanying you. I think it is an excellent idea; but I wish it had been a less dismal play for your entertainment. I recollect the torrents of tears I used to shed over it."

"But 'Venice Preserved,' and 'The Fatal Marriage,' and 'The Gamester,' are all one more miserable than the other; and we might have fallen on any of those, and I own to preferring a deep tragedy to the best comedy that ever was played," said Mr. Dellincourt.

"And so did your father before you," said Margaret, laughing. "I remember, as if it were yesterday, how he, one evening, crept into a dark corner of the box to

cry unobserved, and his sobs betrayed him. I forget the name of the play which so moved him, but he never spoke the whole evening after; and he told me afterwards, that it made him unhappy for three days! I call that seeing a tragedy to some purpose."

Margaret did not appear to be much fatigued. She seemed better, and in better spirits than she had been for some time. Constance felt no anxiety at leaving her. She was very anxious to see Young, and, after an early tea, she and Mr. Dellincourt set off in high spirits.

Margaret stood at the window to see them drive away. Constance looked out as the coach turned the corner of the street—Margaret still stood looking after them.

"Dear heart!" said old Nanny. "I hope Miss Constance will get up her fine spirits again; it did me good to hear her laugh as she went off just now. But you will not be thinking of sitting up for her? If I had my way, you should go to bed now. You will be ill to-morrow, after all this."

"I am ill now, I think. Within the last few minutes I have a strange feeling in my head that I never had before, and it extends down my right arm."

"Is it the pain?" asked Nanny, anxiously.

"No; it is a tingling numbness. It is better now. I will go to bed; I feel as though I should sleep well to-night."

"Will you not send for the doctor? He said you were to send for him the moment you felt yourself ill. You had better let me send David."

"No, no; I am only sleepy and fatigued. Constance will be home early. I shall have wakened up again by that time."

Had it been one of her ordinary attacks of spasms, Nanny would have been alarmed; but her mistress had been so much better all the day, and gone through so much unusual fatigue, that she had no misgiving about the drowsiness, but got her into bed as quickly as possible. In half-an-hour she perceived a change in the breathing and the countenance of Margaret. She despatched a messenger for a medical man, and another to

the theatre for Constance, but with little hope that he would succeed in finding her.

In the meantime, Constance was at the play. The house was crowded, and it was a most brilliant scene. In spite of her strong-minded resolutions, Constance was obliged to pay tribute to the genius of the acting, and to shed her tears like any other ordinary mortal. She was completely absorbed in what was passing, until the curtain dropped at the end of the third act.

"Are you ill? or what is the matter?" asked her companion, anxiously. "What has come over you so suddenly? Is it the heat?"

"No, I am quite well. You will think me foolish, but I wish to go home. I feel an inquietude I cannot describe. I am sure something is amiss with my aunt. I cannot rest here till the end of the piece. Will you take me home now—directly?"

"Of course I will, if you wish it. But do not alarm yourself without cause; you are only fatigued, and your nerves are overwrought. But we will go at once; lean on my arm."

With some difficulty they made their way out. The anxiety of Constance increased every moment. Mr. Delincourt called a coach, and ordered the man to drive quickly. They neither of them spoke during the course.

Old Nanny met them at the door.

"Thank God you are come, Miss Constance. How did David find you out?"

"I have not seen him. But my aunt—what has happened to her?"

"She has not been just so well. I thought you would like to be with her, and I sent David to try to find you out in the theatre. The doctor has been, and will come again in half-an-hour. He is only just gone. Now, keep yourself quiet, Miss Constance, and do not look in that way. You know how it would distress her if she came to herself and saw you."

Constance flew rather than walked to her aunt's room. At the door she stopped; by a violent effort she controlled her excitement, and entered the room as quietly

as though it were empty. Margaret sat propped up with pillows; the windows were open, and the room was in disorder. Blood was slowly trickling down her temples, where leeches had been applied, and a woman was bathing them with hot water. Margaret did not seem unconscious when Constance approached, but her senses were dull and numbed. She turned her eyes heavily upon her, and made an attempt to speak; but her lips were swollen and powerless, and her voice was an inarticulate murmur in her throat. This semi-consciousness lasted only an instant; her eyes closed, and she breathed heavily.

The doctor returned, and tried other remedies, but without success. The breathing became less painful, but consciousness never returned. The slumber was deepening towards death.

Constance sat by the bedside during those hours, gazing upon her face with a stupified intentness, sensible neither of grief nor fear, watching only for a ray of recognition, and never removing her eyes, lest the one precious moment should escape. The candles seemed to burn darkly, and the room grew chill as the night wore on. The servants crept stealthily through the open door from time to time, to learn how things were going. Nanny leaned on the board at the bed-foot, and watched her mistress as intently as Constance. The old nurse sat in an arm-chair, and dozed, contenting herself with rising, from time to time, and giving a look towards the bed, shaking her head with a grim, official sympathy.

There was a grand ball going on, on another side of the square; the sound of the music and the noise of the carriages came through the open windows, and the bright lights gleamed across the darkness.

By twelve o'clock, all was over in the chamber of Death.

Without any return of consciousness, but without pain or struggle, Margaret Herbert passed away, at the age of sixty-eight.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE next morning all was in the sad, suppressed bustle and excitement which always follows a death in the house. The natural grief has to be suspended to give place to the prosaic and material details which, however inevitable, rob the aspect of death of its awful mysteriousness.

To the undertaker and his men, the dead are invested with no solemnity, they are merely *items* in the funeral—"parties to be interred," taking their place with the scarves, hatbands, and first or second-class feathers, as the case may be. The deepest grief and most terrible bereavement they witness from behind the impenetrable breastplate of "a matter of business."

Had it not been for the accidental presence of Mr. Dellincourt, Constance would have been in a very desolate condition; he undertook all the arrangements, and gave all the necessary orders.

Constance had been removed almost by force from the bedside, to which she clung with the tenacity of convulsion. She did not shed a single tear, but gazed, with a stony despair, on the calm face of death. The medical man, who arrived a few minutes after all was over, assisted to remove her to another room, and administered a composing draught, which she swallowed mechanically

when it was placed to her lips. He then desired that she might be undressed and laid in bed, impressing upon old Nanny that she must on no account be left alone even for a minute.

It was a great blessing to poor old Nanny that there was a call upon her attention ; her anxiety about Constance diverted the grief that would have overwhelmed her. Mr. Dellincourt wrote to the Harrops, but it would unavoidably be several days before they could receive the letter, as they were to diverge from their direct road to pay a visit to an old friend of Mr. Harrop's, who had been prevented by an attack of gout from being present at the wedding ; to send the letter to them there would have been unavailing, as it was across the country, and no direct post. His only hope was, that they would only delay a day there. He was very anxious that Constance should be under Mrs. Harrop's care as soon as possible.

A memorandum, written by Margaret, and dated about a week previously, was found in her pocket-book ; it contained plain directions as to what Constance was to do in case of her death occurring unexpectedly, and instructions where her will was deposited, and where Constance might obtain all necessary funds.

Margaret had foreseen everything, and provided for everything, so far as it was possible.

It was the second day after Margaret's death, that early in the morning a hackney-coach drove up to the door. The housemaid, who was only in the act of getting up, hastened to answer the impatient summons, and Charles Herbert, pale and haggard from the fatigue of a long journey, ascended the steps. The housemaid was a country girl, whom Margaret had brought up with her from Royton, and had never seen him before.

"Are you the undertaker, please Sir?" said the girl. "Mr. Dellincourt is not up yet."

"I! What do you mean? Is any one dead?"

"Yes, please Sir, the missus, and I thought you were come about the funeral. Mr. Dellincourt gave out word that he was to be called as soon as anybody came."

"And who the devil is Mr. Dellincourt? Has Mr. Marchmont left this house? Is David here?—send him to me."

The girl looked glad enough to make her escape; and Charles Herbert stood impatiently in the hall, not knowing what to think of his strange reception.

His only idea was that Mr. Marchmont had let the house, for some reason or other. At length David made his appearance, with a face full of sorrowful importance.

"Oh, Mr. Herbert! I am glad you are come! It will be a great comfort to Miss Constance. You have heard what has happened?"

"What *has* happened? tell me, and be quick."

"The missus is gone, and poor Miss Constance is breaking her heart."

Charles Herbert staggered back against the wall. The man supported him to the nearest room, and placed him in a chair, whilst he threw open the shutters.

"Will you let me get you something, Sir? you are very ill."

Charles impatiently motioned to him that he would have nothing.

"It was awfully sudden, Sir," continued the man. "We did not know where to find you; and if it had not been for Mr. Dellincourt, there would have been no one to give the orders. He came up to the marriage."

"Whose marriage?" said Charles, more and more bewildered.

"Miss Wilmot's as was, Sir. Miss Constance was bridesmaid; and missus was quite well in the morning, and went to church with them; but it was too much for her, and she was took ill and died that night."

"Good God, how dreadful!" gasped Charles. He began to tremble violently, his face was livid and contracted, a violent nervous crisis ensued, which looked very alarming. The servant did not know what to do. He hurried away, and sent the coach, which had not yet been discharged, for a medical man, and ran to prevent, if possible, the other servants from disturbing Constance; but his precautions were vain, for the housemaid had

already aroused her, and she entered the room where her father was lying, just as the attack was at the worst.

Constance was perfectly calm ; and with the assistance of old Nanny, who followed her, she bathed her father's head with cold water, and rendered him the assistance which the servant had been too much alarmed to think of. But she did it mechanically, without evincing surprise or emotion of any kind.

When the medical man arrived, he pronounced Charles Herbert to be on the brink of a serious illness, which must have been hanging about, and the sudden shock had precipitated. He ordered him at once to bed. Old Nanny endeavoured to prevail on him to forbid Constance to exert herself ; but he declared it was the best thing that could have happened for her.

Constance seemed suddenly endowed with the foresight and decision of half a dozen persons. She gave orders quietly, and saw them executed, took her own place beside the bedside of her father, and proceeded to carry out minutely all the doctor's directions ; but it was all done as if she were in a trance. No emotion of any kind disturbed the marble rigidity of her features. She was like one turned to stone. All that the kindest and most thoughtful brother could have been, Mr. Dellincourt proved himself at this time of trial ; but Constance appeared to be altogether unconscious of his services.

The day before the funeral, an elderly man-servant, out of livery, came to the house, requesting to see Nanny. Nanny recognised in him the individual who had been her fellow-servant in Italy, and who had returned to England when his master quitted Margaret.

"My lord has shut himself up, and seen no one since he heard of the death. I did not think he had so much feeling left. It has broken him a great deal."

"I always knew it would come home to him, sooner or later," said Nanny ; "but my mistress had recovered from all the evil he had brought upon her, long before she was taken away, so far as being unhappy was

concerned. She had no cause to reproach herself, and it is only that which makes sorrow endless."

"My lord bid me ask you, if I had the opportunity, whether she left any message with you for him?"

"Tell your lord that my mistress never named his name, and it is my opinion she had allowed him to pass from her mind as one not worth remembering."

"He has never properly been friends with himself since he left her. He repented of it once, and that was always. He has taken the news of her death very hard."

"Maybe he thinks his own turn will come next," said Nanny, sarcastically; "for do not think he is one to be sorry about anything that does not concern himself."

"He bid me inquire at what time the funeral was to leave the house. It is my opinion that he intends to follow it."

"He did his best to send her to the grave when she was in the prime of life, and it is just mockery to try to ease his conscience by following her funeral at this time of day; and he may learn what he wants to know from somebody else, for I will not tell him."

Nanny's heart had always been filled with a deadly indignation, and this opportunity of giving it utterance was a consolation in the midst of her grief.

The messenger departed, and apparently obtained the requisite information elsewhere; for the next day, when the *cortège* left the house, it was joined by a close dark chariot, with a coronet on the panels. Inside, there was an old, pale, stern-looking man, who gazed straight before him, with a dreamy, vacant gaze. He was thinking of the past more than the present; of the days when he and Margaret were in Italy, and she had been the wife of his youth. The difference that comes in life is oftentimes nearly as great as that between life and death. He had done a grievous wrong to the woman to whom he had given the strongest pledges that could induce one human being to trust another, and now, what remained to him of all the objects for which he had broken his faith? To what purpose had been all the

waste he had made of that inner life which makes the truth and beauty of what is seen? Verily, this world passes away, and the grace and the fashion of it perishes.

All his past life looked so near and so clear, it seemed as though he could reach it; but the hundred years that lie before us, are nearer than the moment that has just passed.

In the household Margaret had left, life continued its resistless sweep. The gap she had left was even now beginning to be drawn together. Every day brought its own incidents, which arranged themselves into completeness without any reference to her who had been.

Charles Herbert continued very ill, though the sharpness of his attack had subsided into a nervous irritable debility. His one great anxiety appeared to be the safety of a small portfolio which he kept constantly under his pillow or about his person; manifesting remarkable uneasiness when anyone chanced to glance towards it. The eyes of Constance, which were anxiously fixed upon him, seemed particularly to importune him. He expressed the most nervous impatience to remove to the Chantry, but, besides his illness, there were affairs connected with Margaret's will which obliged them to remain some time in town.

Two days after the funeral, the Harrops arrived. They had found the letter that was awaiting them at home, and turned round their horses' heads, and travelled as fast as possible to reach Constance. The sight of her friend roused Constance from her apathy, and unlocked the fountain of her brain; her tears flowed without restraint, and seemed as though they would never cease.

Their idea had been to take her home with them, but the state of her father's health rendered that impossible; and, painful as it was, it was the very best thing that could befall Constance, to have an imperative duty laid upon her, and which would absorb all the strength and judgment she possessed. She had become necessary to her father, and there was no one who could supply her place. This would do more than anything else to

prevent her from being swallowed up with over-much sorrow.

However individually painful or disagreeable an imperative situation may be, no matter what amount of fatigue or annoyance it may entail, the fact that it admits of no question, effectually prevents all the *friction* which, alike in morals as machinery, is the great source of unprofitable wear and tear.

If Mrs. Harrop had needed any further comment upon the irony of time, it was furnished during the few days she remained under the roof of Charles Herbert. Worn to a skeleton, a prey to a melancholy which seemed to possess him like an evil spirit, consuming him as by an internal fire, without the energy, he sat in gloomy helplessness, the most miserable man that could be seen. And this was he who had laid desolate so many years of her life, because she had clung obstinately to her own idea of his perfection, and refused to see what was before her eyes !

If men, and women, too, could only be strong enough to let their idols go when they loosen in their grasp, they would be spared much ashes and bitterness which now fall to their lot. Charles Herbert was not changed; the qualities that were in him then had only developed, brought forth their natural fruit, and were now run to seed !

At length Charles was pronounced well enough to travel. Old Nanny, and another servant, were despatched before to get all things in readiness. Whilst Constance and her father, attended by David, who had been Margaret's servant, followed by easy stages, and the Harrops were once more at liberty to set their faces homeward.

CHAPTER XLIV.

DURING Charles Herbert's last absence from England, instead of going to Vienna, he had made a voyage to America, and gone on to New Orleans, impelled by the vagrant, restless spirit which prevented him from ever finding rest in one place long together.

The thirst for gold had gained upon him greatly within the last few years. It had ceased to be the desire to leave Constance independent at his death, it had become a love of money for its own sake, combined with a morbid dread of coming to poverty! He had got a fixed idea that he should die in a workhouse, and he had become penurious in his habits, dirty and sordid in his person. Gambling was the only means in which he had any faith for getting money, and it was, besides, the ruling passion of his life—the only point of vitality that still remained in activity. If this had become feeble, he would, in all probability, have sunk down into a *chiffonnier*, and found at once his solace and employment in scraping together all the rags, and bones, and rubbish that could be found by diligent search.

In New Orleans his talents for gambling found ample scope: his reckless stakes and deep play, combined with the penuriousness of his dress and mode of life, excited attention, and he enjoyed the mysterious reverence which

is shown to a miser—a man whose wealth is always measured by the deplorableness of his appearance.

It was a strange idiosyncrasy; the reality of the privations he imposed on himself he did not feel; but the dread of having to endure them from necessity was a corroding thought that deprived him of rest, though it was highly improbable that any misfortune would reduce him to hardships greater than those he voluntarily accepted. Gambling was the imaginative point in his life, the only outlet from the dirty, sordid realities with which he surrounded himself.

One night, in a gambling-house, his acquaintance was challenged by an Englishman of singularly unprepossessing aspect—a hard, clumsy-looking man, who seemed to have been cut into shape by cunning and impudence. He had with him two companions of the same stamp, but more underbred than himself. He proved to be Mr. Maryland, the son of old Maryland by his first marriage.

Charles had not seen his wife's step-son more than three times in his life; since his marriage all intercourse had ceased, and he was not at all pleased at this attempt to renew it. But gambling brings a man acquainted with strange company, and blunts all fastidiousness. Charles lived in a mean lodging, and they lived at a first-rate hotel; nevertheless, a certain amount of intimacy sprang up between them. Mr. Maryland had apparently his own reasons for cultivating Charles Herbert's acquaintance; he courted him in every possible way, and published the connection there was between them wherever he went. He spread reports of Charles's wealth and station at home, his ancient family and high standing, until Charles was looked upon as a personage, by those in his own meridian, who believed him to be all the British aristocracy rolled into his one person.

Charles did not dislike the consideration he enjoyed, and did not deny any of the honours that were imputed to him, further than by declaring that he was a poor man, who would come to die in a hospital; which was of course treated as the pleasant jest of a rich man.

They remained in New Orleans some time, during which Charles Herbert had played with various success, but his winnings were not so considerable as he had expected. He had lost chiefly to Maryland and his companions on the day they invited him to dinner at their rooms in the hotel. After dinner they offered him his revenge.

The sitting was prolonged through the whole night, until late in the following day. Charles Herbert rose at length the winner of a considerable sum, which was handed over to him chiefly in English notes, and partly in gold. One of the party then produced a quantity of jewellery, which he declared he had won on shipboard.

During his residence in India, Charles Herbert had become skilled in the value of precious stones, and he saw at once that those before him were of fine quality, a set of diamonds and sapphires, in particular, which were worth a prince's ransom.

The man who possessed them seemed entirely ignorant of their value, and offered either to play for them, or to sell them for a sum so trifling that Charles eagerly clinched the bargain. The man stipulated that he should receive gold, to which Charles, secure in his own judgment, readily consented.

He considered that the last twenty-four hours had been the luckiest in his life. That same day Maryland and his companions left New Orleans. Charles imagined they were going on a gambling speculation elsewhere, and heard of their departure with indifference, or rather with a certain gladness. It delivered him from their society, which had become importunate.

Two days afterwards he took up an English newspaper, which gave a detailed account of an audacious bank robbery, and the abstraction of a quantity of valuable jewellery, which had been lodged in the bank as security for a loan.

A cold perspiration broke out upon Charles as the horrible idea flashed upon him that *he* might be in possession of this stolen property! It was but too true! The number of the notes he had received corresponded,

and of the jewellery being that which had been stolen there could be no doubt.

The horror of his position rose vividly before him. He had been the companion of these men ; he had been seen publicly as their associate. Maryland was known to be connected with him. As to the jewellery, he had bought it for so much below its value, that he could not entertain a hope of persuading any jury that he had become possessed of it even in a *quasi*-honest manner. The confederates had no doubt disposed of other portions of the property in the city, in which case his position was terrible. They were safe, gone he knew not whither ; whilst he remained to bear the brunt of any evil chance that might ensue !

All moral courage and energy had gradually rusted out of him ; but there remained a morbid dread of anything which should cause *éclat* or scandal. He did not dare to take the only rational course that remained for him, and by a voluntary communication forestal all awkward discoveries. His only idea was to get back to England and "consult Marchmont," who exercised over him the authority of a strong mind, combined with the despotic influence of a creditor.

He accordingly sought out a vessel that was on the point of sailing for England. He would gladly, even in that moment of extremity, have economised on the passage-money, and taken a steerage berth ; but he did not dare, and with a pang of bitter reluctance he secured a cabin to himself and his ill-got wealth. It was not until they were under weigh that he could breathe freely. Up to the last instant he had "heard a voice in every wind," and seen an officer of justice in every beggar in the street.

Once safe in his own cabin, he secured the door, and proceeded to inspect the jewels, which he had not dared to look upon since the day of his fatal discovery ; but now he untied the leathern bag that contained them, and they gleamed before his eyes in all their beauty. He felt a pang at the idea that he must give them up. The pure water of the diamonds, the mysterious gleam of

the sapphires, entered his heart like poison. The thought of having to resign them was even worse than the fear that had haunted him of having them discovered in his possession.

Whilst he was thus gazing, the dinner-bell rang, and, hastily securing the jewels, he joined the other passengers at table.

By the chance which always seems to play with loaded dice, an old gentleman near him began to talk about the great bank robbery, and to speculate on the probability of the thieves coming to America. He told several wonderful stories of the fatality by which those who had committed a crime were induced to take precisely the course which was to denounce them, supporting the theory he held, that criminals always afforded the clue to their own detection.

Charles Herbert did not feel particularly comfortable under this discourse, which merged into an argument about circumstantial evidence, and the innocent men who had fallen victims to it. He made his escape as soon as possible, feeling as though the eyes of all present were fixed upon him in a strangely inquisitive fashion.

He returned to his dangerous treasures ;—the crisp, glossy bank-notes, the dazzling beauty of the jewels, had witchcraft in them. He persuaded himself that there was less risk in keeping them than in giving information about them. He tried to persuade himself that he was their lawful owner. He had *paid* for the jewels—he had *won* the money ; it would be so much positive loss to himself if the property were given up to those from whom it had been previously plundered ; and why was he, an honest man, to bear the injury ? Why was he to be stripped that others might have restitution ?

Then, there was the dreadful chance that his story might not be believed. The horror of being questioned—suspected ; the scandalous *éclat* which would unavoidably ensue in any case ; and the very shady sort of credit that, under the most favourable circumstances, could accrue to him if the real truth were all known and believed.

The more he thought of it, the worse the story seemed to tell against himself. Then he thought of Constance, and the shock it would be to her to discover that her father was a gambler, and the companion of thieves. He recollected at that moment, as if the devil had whispered it into his ear, that Mr. Marchmont, who was so hard and cynical towards the world in general, was scrupulously careful to keep his son in ignorance of the very questionable nature of his money transactions ; and ought he to be less careful as regarded Constance ? He recollected the attachment between her and young Marchmont, and he thought the exposure of this affair would only furnish an excuse to insult her ; or, at least, in some way to increase the bondage in which that man already held him.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE result of anxious days and restless nights, was the determination to keep both money and jewels; to conceal them carefully as soon as he reached England, and to await some fortunate accident for disposing of them. Charles felt his mind relieved from a heavy weight when he came to this decision; he tried to fancy he had taken a most prudent resolution, but it was, in reality, only the satisfaction of keeping the property instead of giving it up.

Whilst he was debating this matter, he had, under the plea of indisposition, confined himself to his cabin. He now thought it necessary to mix with the other passengers, "lest he might excite suspicion."

"You are quite a hermit, Mr. Herbert," said the old gentleman, whose discourse on the first day of their going to sea had so sorely discomposed him, and who was now taking a constitutional walk up and down the deck, enjoying the fresh breeze. Charles Herbert started at being thus addressed, and trying not to look guilty, he said something about sea-sickness. The old gentleman chuckled. "Ah, you should do as I do, and have a bucket of salt-water dashed over you every morning when you leave your berth. Keep a sound mind in a sound body, and sea-sickness, or sickness of any sort, would keep its distance."

This old gentleman, with his white hair, rosy port-wine looking cheeks, and grey twinkling eyes, seemed, to the morbid fancy of Charles, transformed into a detective in disguise, surreptitiously endeavouring to find out what he did in his cabin.

"I always think that if people would be good and contented, they might always be happy, and so I tell my young folks. Come, Mr. Herbert, what say you to a bit of backgammon till dinner-time—sixpence a game?"

Charles Herbert fancied a snare in this innocent proposal.

"Thank you," said he, hurriedly, "but I do not play; I never gamble."

"Why, bless the king! who ever dreamed of gambling? There is no harm in an innocent game of backgammon," rejoined the old man, testily.

"Is it Mr. Herbert talking against gambling?" said a passenger, who stood near; "that would be Satan reproving sin, with a witness; why, he made quite a sensation in the billiard rooms, and his luck at *lansquenet* was something marvellous, as I know to my cost. By the way, are those friends of yours gone to Cuba, as they intended?"

"They were no friends of mine. My acquaintance with them was casual; they did not tell me of their movements," said Charles, haughtily.

"I thought one of the fellows, Maryland, he called himself, said he was your relation?"

"It is an honour I should be sorry to claim; but he is no relation at all."

"Ah, well, now that is curious; they seemed great companions of yours when I saw them along with you."

Charles looked and felt annoyed, but the gong sounded for dinner, and in the bustle that ensued, the conversation naturally ceased.

That evening, as Charles was smoking over the side of the vessel, the same passenger came up to him, and said, with an air of confidence, "You seemed vexed this morning, but I don't mind telling you a bit of a secret. The companion of that fellow, Maryland, paid me my

winnings one night in a note that is advertised amongst those in the bank robbery. Maybe the same thing happened to you, and I thought I would just consult you. He might have taken it through ill luck, as I did; but still, it is an awkward thing to have stolen property traced to one."

"If it were my case, I should give information to the police as soon as we reached England," replied Charles, coolly flinging away the end of his cigar.

"Maybe so," replied the other. "But it would be a deuced bore to lose so much money."

He looked cunningly and inquiringly at Charles, who would gladly have given twice ten pounds to have obtained possession of the note in question. This incident was not calculated to compose his nerves, but, after all, it was only a fraction of the stolen property, and he could do nothing; it was another item in the risk that he must run. He held aloof from all his companions during the remainder of the voyage.

The shock that awaited him on his arrival in London, acting upon the highly excited state of his nerves, produced a crisis that might easily have proved fatal. That it did not, was perhaps to be regretted for his own sake, and that of all connected with him.

Arrived at the Chantry, he shut himself in his own room, and, for the last time, feasted his eyes on the fatal beauty of the jewels. He loved them better for all the danger and disgrace he incurred for them. The fashion of their setting was rich and fanciful; evidently unique; designed no doubt as some love-token, it was not probable there would be other sets like them to give the aspect of a coincidence to his possession.

He was rapidly becoming insane on the point of hiding them, and developed all the elaborate cunning of madness. He took them out of their setting, and secured them in a bag of Chamois leather, stitching each stone separately, which was a work of some time; he then broke up, in small pieces, the gold and silver settings, which he melted as well as he could in an old glue-pot over the fire, until all trace of their fashion was defaced,

But difficulties arose to his imagination at every turn, and the amount of cunning and diplomacy he employed to obtain a fire in his room without, as he imagined, exciting suspicion, would have sufficed for a State conspiracy.

The precautions with which he encumbered his endeavours to obtain the means of raising the flag beneath the grate in his dressing-room, employed him for three weeks; and every step he took, seemed to his morbid and exaggerated fancy so many palpable links in the chain of evidence which might be drawn round him.

This strain upon his nerves continued for a month. His efforts to guard against suspicion literally paralyzed his power to move, and for whole days together he was the prey of the most pitiable indecision. He often lay awake half the night, debating whether it would best elude suspicion if he were to come down stairs to breakfast, or have it brought up to his bedside. The door of his dressing-room he easily kept locked, but he fancied that everybody who entered the room looked at it inquisitively.

At last the money, and the jewels, and the melted mass of the settings, were safely buried beneath the hearth-stone of the dressing-room, and he breathed freely once more. Though what particular or general benefit he could derive from the possession of a treasure he was obliged to hide from the light of day, and dare neither use nor look upon, it would be hard for anyone but a miser or a madman to say.

In less than a week, however, the fatal idea struck him, that the housemaid might be tempted by the devil to raise up the stone which he had laid down with so much labour. He had used about ten times more mortar than a professional workman would have employed, and it hardened very slowly.

The moment this idea seized him, he brought workmen to the Chauntry, under pretext of alterations, and had the windows of the dressing-room bricked up, and with his own hands he securely nailed up the door, as he fondly hoped, upon his secret for ever, and had a massive book-case placed before it.

CHAPTER XLVI.

CONSTANCE had been too much taken up with her own grief to pay much attention to her father's proceedings during the first few weeks of their return to the Chauntry. Every object that met her eye was associated with her who was gone. Margaret's presence still seemed to linger in every room; every article of furniture, every plant and flower in the garden, bore the impress of her arrangement; all things were as they had been,—the same to all appearance,—but the difference to Constance!

The sight of the ordinary articles of clothes or furniture which were in daily use by those who have been taken away from us by death, is a most painful aggravation of sorrow, to see these fragile, perishable things surviving them, is at first a bitter aggravation. It is not until time has passed over us, that they become memorials of a precious past that cannot be changed or reversed.

The first excitement of grief had passed away; there was no longer any call upon her for exertion, and Constance felt that life lay upon her with a weight heavy as lead. Neither hope nor object was to be seen which could vary the dull monotony of the solitude that stretched before her. Life looked very dreary from the point she had reached.

But she was not to remain long without some active sources of annoyance.

No sooner had Charles finished hiding his secret, than he began to feel the irksomeness of stopping at home to guard it. A rambling life had become so completely his ordinary mode of existence, that the necessity, whether real or imaginary, of remaining in one spot was intolerable. When the master of the house is ill at ease, there is always scant peace and comfort for every other member of the household. Charles could find no outlet for his restlessness out of doors, in the active management of his estate, for Mr. Marchmont had appointed his own agent and his own plans, with which Charles did not dare to interfere.

There had been great changes in the neighbourhood; a new generation had grown up, and Charles felt little inclination to gather up the dropped threads of old acquaintanceships, or to weave the web of new ones. He had become moody, suspicious, and hypochondriacal,—seldom leaving the house except for a short ride or a desultory stroll through the fields, clad in an old drab-coloured dressing-gown and a black silk cap, now old and greasy, with his hair allowed to grow wild, and his beard untrimmed for days together.

The habit of living in dressing-gown and slippers cannot be called a vice; and yet it has a very demoralizing effect upon the man who gives in to it. A general loosening of all energy and promptness follows upon it. There is much significance lying in the Apostle's injunction to "stand, therefore, having our loins girded."

Charles did not, however, sink into vacuity. The constraint and *ennui* of his life found an outlet in worrying about the housekeeping, and in incessant endeavours to introduce a sordid, pinching economy. He tormented Constance with reproaches about her extravagance, which would bring him to the workhouse. He would go into the kitchen half a dozen times in the day to screw the fire into a narrower compass, and upbraid old Nanny with her reckless disregard of the value of fuel. Nanny, who had never in her life been subjected to the interference of master or mistress, was furious at this new phase of things. Spendthrifts are always the most unmerciful of

economists ; but, indeed, most people carry out their virtues at the expense of their neighbours.

Margaret's household had always been carried on with a certain elegant thrift, an order and regularity that were, like the light of day, matters of course, but noiseless and beautiful. Constance had fallen into the same habits all unconsciously, and she had ruled her own house at Royton with as much discretion as if she had been the wise woman described by King Solomon. Now, however, she found herself suddenly superseded and treated as a child ; chided, thwarted, and contradicted ; her judgment and authority set entirely aside.

Charles insisted upon regulating everything—from the number of potatoes that were given out for dinner, to the scouring of a floor or the burning of a candle—nothing was too minute to escape his worrying inquiries. Constance was far too sad and miserable to offer any opposition ; she yielded passively, endeavouring to take refuge within narrower limits, where she might be free to indulge her own habits of occupation, and exerted herself to comfort and pacify old Nanny, whose disgust and indignation knew no bounds ; but she soon found herself dragged out of her own privacy and leisure to live under her father's eye.

When he was in the house, he never allowed her to leave his presence if he could help it, and yet her society did not appear to afford him pleasure. If she tried to converse, he complained of her chattering ; if she remained silent, he said she was sullen. He suspected her, not of anything in particular, but he was in a state of chronic suspiciousness against the world in general. Whatever he did not entirely comprehend, he imagined might be turned to ill ; and he could not endure that Constance should possess any personal mode of life that did not pass under his own eye.

The weather set in cold and stormy remarkably early this year, and under the plea of saving fuel, he had Margaret's pleasant sitting-room shut up, which obliged Constance to inhabit the gloomy dining-parlour, which only commanded a corner of the Nun's Walk, and an old wall

covered with ivy. Here she was obliged to sit all the day. At first she tried to follow her usual employments, but he could not endure to see her either reading or writing, for no better reason than that they took up her attention. If ever she endeavoured to take refuge in her own bed-room, he always crept stealthily after her, to spy where she was, and to call her down. This partly arose from a nervous fear lest she should enter his room, but chiefly from a childish dislike to being left by himself, and partly from the infirm restlessness that gained upon him from its indulgence.

Constance endeavoured, by retiring early to rest, to secure a few hours of peace and freedom; but he defeated this, by allowing her only a short end of rushlight, and calling at the end of a quarter of an hour to know if her candle were extinguished, giving her no respite from his knocking and calling, until he saw the light disappear from under her door.

His bed-room was opposite to hers, and he arose frequently in the course of the night to ascertain whether she had obtained any surreptitious candles.

She made one last attempt to obtain an hour to herself by getting up early; but rise when she would, her father, whose faculties seemed to be preternaturally sharpened, always divined her purpose, and defeated it by rising himself.

This systematic mode of tormenting was dreadfully irksome to Constance, but she looked upon it in the only light that could render it tolerable,—as a disease, as a mental infirmity which she was bound to meet with patience and gentleness. Any attempt to assert herself, or to carry out her own personal inclinations, would only have induced altercation, and have increased his irritability to a degree at once injurious and painful.

She recollected the words of her aunt, spoken years ago, with regard to the duty she would have to undertake towards her father; and it was well for her that she could recognise it now that it had arrived, for our duties do not come to us packed and labelled. We have to discover them through all the confusion and apparent in-

justice and unreasonableness with which they are often invested.

That Constance was thus able to yield her own will, instead of struggling for it, saved her from much bitter and useless annoyance.

She was anxious to know how things went on at Royton, but her father could not endure to hear the place named, and she was obliged to content herself with thinking about it as she sat over her needlework, the only employment her father would tolerate; and she consoled herself with the hope that she might pay a visit there in the spring.

From time to time she received letters from Mrs. Harrop. But, alas and alas for human nature! Mrs. Harrop was very happy and very busy, dreadfully preoccupied with her husband, her household, the farm, and her schools; and though she loved Constance as dearly as ever, still these things lay on the surface of her daily life, and occupied all the material time of every day: Constance was not mixed up with them, and could only feel sympathy and interest in them at a distance. There was no fault in this, for one of the limitations of human nature is, that it can only be in one place at a time; and its horizon, as far as it can see, even with the best of telescopes, is very limited indeed.

Mrs. Harrop's letters were the only little bits of brightness that came to Constance from without; still she could not help feeling the difference between these cordial, cheering letters, coming from a woman placed in the midst of active duties depending upon her for their fulfilment, and that sweet, intoxicating sympathy, "the wine of life," distilled from the exclusive affection of a heart at leisure, and a life unoccupied by other claims.

Still it was, beyond all doubt, a far better state of things for Mrs. Harrop, and not altogether worse for Constance. It was expedient that she should gain strength to lead her own life without the stimulus of emotion. Our friends may lift us up when we stumble, and support us over the dark and rugged passes in our pilgrimage; but none, not the truest lover or most devoted

friend, may carry another through life. We must each walk on alone, and bear our own burden.

But dreary as the life of Constance seemed to outward appearance, she was not unhappy. She had the undoubting conviction that she was in her right place, and doing precisely the work that it was necessary she should do—the work incumbent upon her, and which could not be delegated to another; and no work of clearly recognised duty is so wearying as the “unchartered freedom” to please ourselves. The obligation of duty is the law of spiritual gravity which keeps our life coherent.

Constance was, however, only nineteen; and this revered sense of duty, although the ruling principle of her life, and growing in strength and clearness every day, still, as yet, it worked within her half-unconsciously, and was not so far developed as to make her independent of human motives; and, in truth, a human motive was far the most distinct and articulate in her own heart. The human motive that gave a sweet ideality to the weary dulness of her material life, was the thought of Phillip.

Of course she had taken to herself the blame of all that had been done or said ungenerous or cruel at their last interview, and had long since come to regard him with the deep pity and admiration due to a true-hearted and unfortunate lover. She could not turn back from her own course—she might not marry him—that was a matter of destiny from which there was no appeal; but love him she might, and love him she did, with all the idolatry of a first passion, which sees neither beginning of time nor end of days, but believes devoutly in its own eternity. She worshipped him, she idealized him; and it is quite needless to say that the Phillip Marchmont of her imagination bore not the slightest trace of resemblance to the Mr. Philip Marchmont of actual life.

Her whole aim was to make herself worthy of him—her one idea to become what Phillip would approve. This thought carried her through the hours of durance she had to pass in the dull and only half-warmed parlour during the months of that dreary winter.

She built bright castles in the air of how, when

Phillip was married—an event she had brought herself to look upon with pleasure—she would become the friend of his wife. Phillip was to bring her, and to present her to Constance with words of noble and loyal affection, claiming her for a friend and sister to them both. Constance felt her heart beat warmly to this appeal, and she thought how much dearer than any sister Phillip's wife would be.

She pictured her full of sweet, womanly tenderness, who would recognise in her present happiness the fruit of another's self renunciation, and endeavour, by her love and sympathy, to compensate to her for what she had given up; and how Philip would stand beside them, rejoicing in this perfect friendship and sisterhood between the two women he loved best in the world.

It must be observed, that although Constance was quite willing that Phillip should love his wife, and be quite happy and contented with her, yet she still asserted her consciousness of having once held the first place with him, which she had resigned, but from which she had never been deposed; and there was a subtle, unacknowledged hope that, although Phillip might love another, it was not to be *quite* so much as he would have loved Constance could he have obtained her.

Then she continued the romance, and pictured them surrounded by their children. She endowed them all with beauty and good gifts, like a fairy godmother. She settled that one should be named after her, and that she would adopt it, and that it should be allowed to live with her altogether. To make amends for this, be it said, she had bestowed upon them a patriarchal number of children, in order that they might spare one without being unnatural.

Then she imagined herself becoming an old lady, and this adopted daughter grown up a beautiful young creature, sought in marriage by a young nobleman every way worthy of her; and then she would endow her with Royton Hall for a wedding present, and go to live with them, and bring up their children, and die at last a beloved old grandmamma!

This was the romance spun out with bright shining sunbeams, day after day, with which Constance enlivened the gloomy discomfort of those winter months. Such was her outer life—such was her inner life ; and so time passed on until the fifth of May, when one morning the postman brought a letter for which he demanded double postage.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE eyes of Constance were anxiously fixed upon her father, as he read through this letter; her heart beat so strongly that it might have almost been heard.

He gave it to her across the table, saying, "This is news, indeed." He looked at her with a kind of pity, and there was a gentle inflection in the tone of his voice, that at any other time would have struck her; as it was, however, all her attention was engrossed by the letter.

It was written in a style of expansiveness very different from the dry brevity of Mr. Marchmont's usual communications, and announced the singular satisfaction he felt in being able to communicate the marriage of his son Phillip with the young and beautiful Miss Ainslie. He went off into a long genealogical digression upon her family and antecedents. The main fact appeared to be, that her father had been the son of Sir Jonas Sefton, of Launston Hall, in Kent; but he was dead, and her mother, left with three daughters, had brought them up in the greatest elegance and gentility. One of the sisters was married to a rich colonel in India. None of them appeared to have much money, but were moving, according to his account, in the best society. Miss Ainslie had been much sought after, had received distinguished offers of marriage, but had refused them all for the sake of Phillip. There had been much opposi-

tion at first, on the part of her own family, who looked higher for her, but the mother at length had yielded to the united entreaties of the young people, &c., &c.

Then followed an account of the amiable condescension of her uncle, the Baronet, who, unable to be present at the ceremony, sent the bride an elegant silver inkstand, and an invitation to visit him at Launston Hall.

Mr. Marchmont's satisfaction and pride in this connection were evidently genuine, but it was only an introduction to the real gist of the letter. He could not so far forget his natural instinct for business as not in some way to bring in his own interest.

There was a postscript, in which he announced that he proposed running down to the Chantry for a few days at the beginning of the week, as he wished to consult Charles upon a certain affair of importance. Also, he added, that if quite agreeable to Miss Constance, Phillip and his bride would spend a couple of days with her on their way to Launston Hall.

The marriage of Phillip had been the foundation of all her day-dreams for many months, and yet, now that it was come to pass, her heart contracted with a pang. It was a hard, sharp reality that she could no longer invest with romance; she had loved Phillip's wife dearly in her imagination, but she felt an instinctive antipathy to the "young and beautiful Miss Ainslie" of flesh and blood. The sudden announcement of his marriage revealed to her how much she had cherished the idea that she still held the first place in his heart. All these emotions resolved themselves into a flood of bitter tears, to conceal which she hastily retired to her own room.

Her father allowed her to remain there in peace for at least a quarter of an hour; he felt very sorry for her, and began, as usual, to reflect upon the evil fate that had pursued him from his youth up, in the course of which he forgot all about Constance, who indeed seemed to him only one more item in the cruelty with which destiny had uniformly treated *him*.

His thoughts gradually reverted to present matters—

to the extreme annoyance of having to receive visitors—the ruinous expense it would be to feed and lodge so many persons; also, he did not like the thought of seeing Mr. Marchmont, from whom, however, he determined strictly to conceal his secret, if he could. Mr. Marchmont, as he knew from experience, had a mesmeric power of attracting secrets, and making the person he was conversing with reveal them in spite of himself. He then began to wonder what could keep Constance so long; and falling readily back into his long-indulged habit of worrying, he called her, and as she did not answer, he went up stairs to knock at her door, and desire her to come down directly.

Poor Constance stopped crying as quickly as she could, bathed her face, and after waiting a few moments in the hope that the traces of her tears would grow fainter, complied at last with the reiterated calls that were made for her.

“Really, Constance, I cannot think why you shut yourself up in your own room so constantly, especially when there is so much to advise about. I am sure I do not know how we are to afford to entertain so many people at rack and manger. It will be a terrible expense.”

“Oh, no, papa; aunt Margaret never used to make any difficulty when you and Mr. Marchmont used to come down to stay here. I think it is very friendly of Phillip to bring his wife to see us. It will be a pleasant change for you.”

“We cannot afford to entertain fine company, child; we must be frugal, very frugal.”

“We will be as frugal as you please when they are gone again, but we must not disgrace our hospitality; and as it is a thing that must be gone through with, it will be the best for Nanny and me to undertake the management, and order things as my aunt used to do. The extra expense I will defray myself.”

Constance looked and spoke with a quiet decision that took an immediate effect on Charles, which at once pained and surprised her. Instead of offering any opposition, he drew back like a rebuked child, and began

whimpering that she should be so cross, and declaring that they would both come to the workhouse. But from that moment he evidently clung to her, as the one that was to stand between him and all the harm there might come to pass from the dreaded visitors. Nanny and Constance were allowed to settle everything as they chose.

As the day for Mr. Marchmont's arrival came on, Charles Herbert's nervous dread increased. He could not bear Constance out of his sight, and he seemed to feel no safety except in her presence.

At length Mr. Marchmont arrived. It was three days before Phillip and his wife were expected.

The change in Mr. Marchmont's aspect was something remarkable. His face, for once in his life, wore a natural expression; a broad, irrepressible smile of complacent satisfaction lighted up his stony black eyes. It was not a very noble or generous expression, but it was, for once, the genuine reflex of what was occupying his mind—which was, the pride and satisfaction of having succeeded in allying himself to a really good family. The secret vanity of his whole life had been crowned with success, and he made no attempt to conceal his feelings, which in itself, was quite a novel sensation.

Before he had been an hour in the house, he had given them a full description of the marriage. There were no less than twenty carriages, all the coachmen and footmen in their full-dress livery, with enormous bouquets and wedding favours. There was quite a crowd round the house to see the bride return from church.

"Is she handsome?" asked Constance, at the first pause in his discourse.

"Handsome? She is lovely! and the most elegant-mannered young lady I ever saw! Her mother, too, is quite a lady of the old school. She burst into tears when her daughter's health was drunk, but refused to leave the table. 'No, Mr. Marchmont,' she said to me, 'my place is here, and here I will remain. I will not allow my daughter to perceive that her happiness is bought at the expense of my suffering.' A beautiful

sentiment, was it not? She and I are great friends. Indeed, she says that she gave her consent to the match entirely out of the liking she had taken to me. The Bishop of Hazlegrove performed the marriage, assisted by his own chaplain, as well as by the regular clergyman of the church. The bishop's daughter and the Honourable Miss Hesketh were the bridesmaids. Everybody said there never had been such a splendid marriage seen in that neighbourhood. It will be remembered for a long time."

Mr. Marchmont did not spare a single detail of bridal splendour, from the magnificent wedding-cake, which weighed upwards of sixty pounds, to the names and titles of the most distinguished guests, always returning to the crowning glory of "the twenty private carriages," with their complement of coachmen and footmen.

Constance listened to all these details with a curiosity strangely mingled with contempt. She tried to think that it was only Mr. Marchmont who was a vulgar, vain man. But it was all so different from everything that she had imagined for Phillip; all her dreams were driven away by this display of sugar and silver favours. She did not know what to think. Sad and oppressed, unable to call up a single scene of the romance that had so long occupied her thoughts, she lay down that night with the feelings that might be supposed of one who, having lived in fairy-land, is suddenly disenchanted, and finds himself lying amongst the withered leaves and fallen boughs of a lonely forest. However, when she awoke the next morning, she set about finishing the arrangement of the rooms, which had been so long disused, and giving to them their old accustomed air of comfort.

It was with a certain magnanimity that she busied herself in carrying all that was best in the house to decorate the rooms set apart for the expected visitors. Her aunt's dressing-glass, with its frame of carved ivory; the japan dressing-box; the Indian screen, and the toilet cover of delicate embroidery. Out of her own room, she brought her ebony chair and crimson cushion, and a large, old Dresden vase, which she filled with

whatever flowers and green leaves she could gather out of the garden ; but the season was backward, and there was very little to gather.

Charles had refused to have any money spent upon the garden. One of his great economies had been at the expense of the flower-garden. Constance availed herself of her new-found authority to have it put in some sort of order. She recollected the first day she had seen Phillip, and the disdain with which he had regarded everything he saw. At the time it had captivated her, as a mark of his superiority ; but now, strangely enough, this was the one point in all the past that stood out in her memory.

As her task proceeded, she recollected his fastidiousness and contempt for whatever was not costly and the best of its kind ; and she looked round upon the faded carpets, and somewhat scanty curtains belonging to an old-world style of housekeeping ; but the oak floors and staircase were polished like jet ; everything was bright, and clean to perfection, and there was nothing obtrusive or out of keeping with the house itself.

But Constance thought of the elegant young bride, and of all the modern environments which Phillip so much appreciated ; she looked upon the result of her labours and sighed ; she felt,—but she would not own to herself what she felt ; she stifled it down, and went to help old Nanny in the kitchen with the pastry and cheesecakes, and other articles of fine cooking, which would be required.

Meanwhile, Mr. Marchmont had been out inspecting the farm. Charles accompanied him with an obsequious attention, intended to conciliate him ; for, alas ! he was more than ever in his power ; and by an agreement for money that had been advanced from time to time, over and above the stipulated income, Mr. Marchmont had secured to himself the power to take possession of the Chantry whenever he pleased, at a moment's notice ; and to Charles it had now become a matter of vital importance to be allowed to remain. Mr. Marchmont had always said that he would never make use of his

power to eject him ; but this marriage of his son with a fashionable young lady had materially altered his plans. His son was no longer hoping to marry Constance, or to be dependent upon her in any way for his introduction to the neighbourhood ; he had made what seemed to be a brilliant match, and must be enabled to shine worthily beside it.

Mr. Marchmont, when the settlements were being debated, had spoken of "The Chauntry lands" as an estate he should settle upon his future daughter-in-law and her children. To Mrs. Ainslie and her family he carelessly mentioned Charles Herbert as his friend, who lived there at present, the estate having once been in the possession of his family ; leaving it to be understood that he referred to a point of remote antiquity.

The young bride, Mrs. Phillip Marchmont, when the visit to the Chauntry was arranged, was fully impressed with the idea that she was going to visit her own dower house, and prepared to be sweetly affable in her manners ; but regarded both Charles and Constance as persons far beneath her in the social scale, and whom she was going to honour by spending two days beneath their roof.

Phillip retained a sullen, smouldering resentment against Constance, and enjoyed the thought of showing her the brilliant match he had secured. He felt heartily glad she had left him free, and did not in the least regret her ; but he was not the less outraged in his self-love that she should have been able to refuse him twice ; nor had he ever cordially forgiven his father for requiring him to make the last attempt.

His bride ran no risk of offending him by her display of affable impertinence towards Constance. He confided to her one day that Constance had been much in love with him, they having been brought up a good deal together ; and that, moved chiefly by compassion, he had made her an offer, which she was quite willing to accept ; but his father had interfered to break off the match, from not liking the connection, there being decided insanity in the family, besides other objections.

Phillip's heart smote him for saying this when he saw

the malicious, eager, cold-hearted curiosity with which his elegant lady pursued the subject; on the day appointed for them to arrive at the Chauntry, he would willingly have avoided the visit if he could, but it was too late; and he could only caution his wife as they went along, not to allow Constance to perceive she was aware of what had passed.

"Of course not, my dear Phillip," said she, putting on her French gloves. "I would not be so *gauche* for the world; but I confess I am curious to see with what countenance she will receive you. Poor little thing! I hope she will not be too much overcome; it will be a trial to her, no doubt."

Mrs. Phillip Marchmont spoke with smiling self-sufficiency, and in a thin, little voice which would have been shrill had it not been carefully modulated by governesses and elocution masters, and the hardness of its *timbre* disguised by the infantine tone to which she had been taught to pitch it. Her words fell from the tip of her lips, and she had a little laugh, which she had been told was captivating and sweet; but to dispassionate hearers it narrowly escaped being a giggle.

"You do not think there is any danger that she will poison me, do you?" she asked, a moment afterwards, with affected alarm. "Those mad people are never safe. I am dreadfully afraid of anything like insanity."

"My dear Henrietta, you are under a mistake. I never said that Constance—Miss Herbert—was mad. I told you that insanity was in the family, which is quite a different thing. You will find Miss Herbert a superior and highly cultivated young woman."

Phillip spoke as he felt—annoyed. His wife looked at him with her inquisitive grey eyes, and then falling back in the corner of the chaise, she said, with an appearance of pique,—

"Ah! I see how it is. You have been more in love with her than you will own, and you are already making comparisons between us."

"And do you not think the comparison must be

in your own favour ? ” replied he, kissing the tips of her straw-coloured gloves with great gallantry. “ I assure you I never felt so proud in my life as I am at the thought of presenting you to her.”

“ I do not see that her dislike or approval signifies to me in the least,” replied the fair bride, with some disdain; “ indeed, any expression of her opinion can only be regarded as impertinent.”

Phillip dropped the subject. One of his father’s maxims was, “ Never contend with women,” and he instinctively adopted it. Shortly afterwards, the chaise turned down the lane that led to the Chantry.

“ Is it not a quaint old place ? ” said Phillip, somewhat anxious to ascertain its effect on his bride.

“ Yes ; but I expected something more baronial, more like Haddon.”

Any other time, she would have declared it charming, but her amiability had been somewhat acidulated.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CHARLES HERBERT, Mr. Marchmont, and Constance, were all waiting in the porch to welcome the new comers. The eyes of the two women naturally sought each other. Constance, in her black dress, without a particle of ornament, except the narrow cambric ruff, which was scarcely whiter than the fair flexible neck it encircled, looked so gracefully noble that Mrs. Phillip Marchmont felt a pang of envy, which was the homage of instinct to her superiority. The moment afterwards came the reassuring consciousness of her own elegance, and the conviction that she must appear a very fine lady beside this young woman in the provinces.

Constance embraced her guest with a warmth that was meant to convey all the thoughts that had been occupying her heart, but her emotion would not allow her to speak. She looked at the woman who was in the possession of the happy destiny that might have been hers, with an intense sympathy. At the first glance she thought her as lovely as an angel, and all the elaborate elegance of her toilet seemed in accordance with the *mignonne* prettiness of her style. Her face was small and childlike, with dazzling little teeth, and thin coral lips that were parted in a never ending smile. A profusion of light golden ringlets fell down beneath her bonnet, and she had the complexion of a beautiful wax doll.

A dispassionate observer might have seen at a glance that she was a great fool, and discerned traces of an obstinate temper underneath all the smiles and dimples that played round her mouth. Her bright grey eyes, too, had a gleam of maliciousness. But Constance was not dispassionate. She had made a romance about Phillip's bride, and was engrossed by her own ideas. She turned from his wife to Phillip, and gave him her hand with frank and noble cordiality, saying, "You are very good to bring her to see us so soon."

The grasp of her hand was full of the friendliest welcome, if Phillip could have read it, but Phillip could only feel awkward and embarrassed; he did not know what to say. Charles Herbert had thrown off his dressing-gown, and attired himself with care for the occasion, and Mrs. Phillip was agreeably surprised to find so fine a gentleman waiting to receive her.

As to Mr. Marchmont, he kissed her with an ostentation of fatherly affection, and made minute inquiries about the journey, all which the young lady received with the pretty *minauderies* of a spoiled child.

She made Phillip carry her dressing-case, and gave emphatic injunctions to her maid to see that nothing was left in the chaise; then, gathering up the skirt of her delicate silk dress, and daintily holding her embroidered handkerchief and vinaigrette, she at length tripped up the old stone steps with an air that she intended should be irresistibly fascinating to the three gentlemen.

As they were crossing the hall, she turned to Constance, with the air of one who is politely addressing another person's *femme de chambre*, and said,—

"Perhaps you will be good enough to show me my room."

Constance felt surprised at the tone and the manner, but she did not comprehend the premeditated impertinence they were intended to indicate.

"Certainly, it is this way; but do not think of dressing; there is no one but ourselves, and dinner will be on

the table directly. I ordered it punctually, for I know of old that Phillip does not like to wait for dinner."

"I cannot possibly sit down this figure; Dawson would be in despair. Dressing for dinner is a point mamma always insisted upon, and Phillip likes it. Will you tell him that I have requested dinner may be delayed for half-an-hour? And if you will send Dawson to me, I will make her be as expeditious as possible."

Dawson entered at this moment.

"Oh, Dawson, you are there! You must dress me like lightning. Your master is impatient for dinner."

"Can I render any assistance?" asked Constance, good-naturedly. "I hope you will feel at home, and ask for anything you want."

"Oh, thank you! I dare say we shall manage charmingly; everything looks very nice. Now, Dawson, quick! I will wear my light blue silk and blonde flounces."

The mistress and the maid became alike engrossed by the mysteries of the toilet, and did not bestow the least attention upon Constance; who, after quietly glancing round to see that nothing else was wanted, left the room.

Phillip took the announcement of the delay with the most amiable complaisance, and even declared that he should take advantage of it to make his own toilet; for "you see," said he, "Henrietta has always been accustomed to live in a certain style. She and her mother always dressed for dinner, even when they were alone, and two footmen always waited."

"I fear the dinner will not improve with waiting," said Constance, as the two elderly gentlemen stood yawning with *ennui* and hunger at being kept so much beyond their natural hour of dining.

"Ah! you see, Miss Constance, the aristocracy have their own way of doing everything, and a proper style of dress for every time of the day; we in the country cannot be expected to understand those niceties, but Mrs. Phillip has lived in the midst of those things all her life. But

you have not told me what you think of her. Is she not a beautiful creature? I am sure you will find her a most affable and charming companion, when you come to know more of her. A little high at first, perhaps; but that will wear off."

Before Constance could make any reply to this address, the young bride made her appearance, elegantly attired in a low, sky-blue silk dress and blonde flounces, with her hair elaborated into a profusion of ringlets. She tripped up to the two gentlemen, and said, with a sweetness that exasperated Constance,—

"Ah, I have kept you from dinner, and Phillip says I am very naughty; but you will not scold me, will you."

Charles Herbert murmured some polite speech that was inaudible; but Mr. Marchmont seemed enchanted, and kissed her hand as he presented his arm to lead her to dinner.

Phillip was preparing to take in Constance, when his wife called him off to pick up her scarf, which she had purposely let fall.

At length they were all seated at table. Old Nanny was furious at the insult that had been offered to her dinner, which, although excellent at the beginning, had greatly deteriorated by the long delay. Constance certainly sat at the head of the table and did the honours as mistress of the house, but she was completely thrown into the shade by Mrs. Phillip, who engrossed everybody's attention by her chattering and *minauderies*, which seemed a source of perfect admiration to her husband and father-in-law.

Constance, who had shrined Phillip in her heart with so much reverence, and had led her life with the view to making it worthy of his approval, and who had considered herself, in her loving humility, as quite unequal to him, wondered how he could tolerate so much affectation and ill-breeding; but she had not yet got the length of blaming him.

When the two ladies retired after dinner, the young

bride, having no one else to speak to, entertained Constance with the details of all the wedding splendour of which she had been the object, and described with minuteness all the articles of her wedding outfit, not omitting a single dress, or the glory of a single feather. After the cambric, and the lace, and the embroidery had been described, she launched out into the chapter of wedding presents, which were enumerated and embellished with all the flowers of rhetoric that could be lavished upon them. To listen to her, one might have imagined that the entire universe had no other object but to glorify Mrs. Phillip Marchmont. She rattled on for nearly an hour in this strain, when, suddenly starting up from the sofa, she exclaimed,—

“I wish you would let me see over the house. I feel quite curious to see it. It looks such a dear, quaint old-world place; and as it is my dower house, I feel a double interest in it. I suppose you have lived here a long time?”

“But—yes! the house belongs to us. It has been in the family for many generations.”

“Ah, indeed!” replied Mrs. Phillip, with a sweet smile; “but I assure you that this house was settled upon me on my marriage by that dear old Mr. Marchmont, who is a perfect love of a father-in-law! He thinks that he cannot do enough for me. From his description, I expected to see something more imposing; but it is a charmingly quaint old place, and you keep it in excellent order. If we settle near here, I shall often come and see how you go on. I consider you as my own tenant!”

It would be difficult to express the shock which this speech caused to Constance. The words carried conviction with them, and were a key to much that had perplexed her. She did not for a moment doubt the truth of what Mrs. Phillip said. She felt choked and suffocated, and could not reply one word. The other, perceiving her confusion, said, with an affectation of concern:—

“Dear me! I hope I have not touched upon any

family mystery? Perhaps I should not have mentioned it; but I could not imagine that what was the subject of my marriage settlement could be a secret!"

"My father seldom speaks to me about business. I was not aware of the transfer," replied Constance, with as much composure as she could command. "It is natural you should wish to see the house. Will you come now?"

In addition to her curiosity to see her "dower house," as she called it, Mrs. Phillip felt a great comfort in mortifying Constance; and there was something in the present situation that was extremely satisfactory and pleasant to her.

"I confess I should like to see the house, if you are equal to showing it; and, after all, it is perhaps as well that you should know how things really stand."

This was said with a sweet smile, and in the most innocent baby-voice: the words seemed to drop like small pearls from the tip of her lips. She rose as she spoke, and Constance by a proud effort, commanded her trouble, and rose also. She lighted a bed-candle, and preceded her guest.

They went through all the rooms except the one that had belonged to Margaret.

"What is that? why may I not enter there?" said Mrs. Phillip, in her spoiled-child way.

"That room was my aunt's," replied Constance, in a low tone.

"Oh! and I suppose you are romantic, and keep it shut up as she left it. Is there not a curious oratory, with a beautiful painted window, attached to it?"

"There is a room that was once an oratory; but it is a simple closet, with white-washed walls, and the window is very simple also."

"Phillip has told me so much about it, that he quite touched my imagination. Your aunt was a very superior woman, I have heard."

The eyes of Constance flashed, and she felt inclined to make a scornful protest ; but a profound contempt, in which, however, there was no bitterness—only a perfectly just estimate of her visitor—stopped her, and she remained silent.

They had now seen all the house, except the part occupied by the farmer and his family, and as Mrs. Phillip had pretty well gratified her impertinence, she the more readily consented to return to the sitting-room, where the gentlemen had adjourned for coffee.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE remainder of the evening passed heavily enough. Mrs. Phillip sat upon the sofa and coquetted with her husband, showing off her *minauderies* for the benefit of Constance; the two elder gentlemen were playing piquet at a table apart; Constance sat silently knitting, for no one seemed to need her conversation.

At length bed-time came; and alone in her own room, Constance was at liberty to sit down amid the ruin of all her day-dreams. Phillip's wife, whom she was to have taken to her heart as a sister, was a silly, selfish woman, about whom she could make no sort of charitable illusion. How could Phillip have been so blinded, so imposed upon, as to admire her! He could not read her character, or else surely he would have interposed to shield Constance from her petty malice.

In vain she looked back through every incident of the day; she could not find one single instance of kindness or consideration, or even an indication that he remembered the past. She wept bitterly, with a child-like sense of unhappiness, and a faith in tears that people lose as they grow older in sorrow. But blaming Phillip was not the way to grow comforted herself, and she began to take herself to task. It was she who was selfish and *exigeante*. How should Phillip understand all the petty jealousies and rivalries of women? His attention to his

wife was all right and natural ; she tried to praise him for it. Then the thought crept in, that perhaps Phillip had married in pique ; men always felt bitterly mortified by a refusal ; and how should he know her entire and intense devotion to him ? She had been cold, haughty, unlovable. If Phillip had married unhappily, it was all her fault—she had been the cause of all !

When she had reached this pitch in her meditations, and was able cordially to blame herself, she felt comforted. Phillip was still excellent—all she had ever thought him, and, in addition, was in imminent risk (as she thought) of being made very unhappy by the wife he had chosen ; so much the more was there need for her to be faithful to him : he would yet need and value her friendship. She would trample down her own selfishness, and be noble and strong for his sake !

Resolutely she strove to shut her eyes to the actual fact of things. It is only the highest stage of heroism that can admit the wedge which begins the separation between us and our cherished idols. We try to uphold them in their shrines, and cannot let them fall long after we have discovered that “there is no help in them.”

The next morning there was to be a long ride, to show Mrs. Phillip the estate and surrounding country.

Constance excused herself from accompanying them, and her plea was readily admitted : no one wanted her. Mrs. Phillip went up stairs to get ready, and Constance stood at the parlour window, gazing out upon the “Nun’s Walk,” when Phillip entered the room.

“Oh, Constance, will you trust me with the key of Aunt Margaret’s room ? Henrietta has set her heart upon seeing the oratory.”

He paused in some confusion ; the inconvenience of his request seemed suddenly to strike him.

“You see,” he continued, in a tone of apology, “she is such a child, and has been spoiled all her life. She is different to you.”

He looked at her as he said this with an expression she well remembered, and the tone of his voice was gentle,—such as it had been in the old days of their in-

timacy. It had been his great charm, and it had not lost its spell ; it signified, however, no more than that he wished to soften his abruptness, much as he would have begged pardon of a stranger against whom he had pushed accidentally.

To Constance, however, it seemed an indication that he still cared for her. Before she could reply, however, Mr. Marchmont came to say that the horses had been brought round. Mrs. Phillip entered immediately after him, equipped in a beautiful riding-habit, and the most becoming hat and plume imaginable. Constance went to the porch to see them mount. Mrs. Phillip took an immense time to draw on her gloves, and to mount on her saddle, and it was then a long time before she would dispense with the assiduities of the three gentlemen.

She certainly looked a very pretty creature, and sat her horse remarkably well. She was in high spirits, and laughed a little silvery laugh as she nodded to Constance, and hoped that no one would run away with her in their absence !

This laugh jarred horribly on Constance, who stood there feeling herself belonging to nobody, of no consequence to anyone—bitter tears sprang to her eyes. Yes ! this was her place—alone, and left outside all the circles that loving hearts draw round home. What had she ever done that it should be so ? Why was she to be treated like a criminal and an outcast ? She felt proudly that she was worth so much more than that smiling, malicious woman who had just rode away ; that she could be so good, and strong, and loving, in all the relations from which she was cut off for ever ; and with every pulse in her heart beating and throbbing with passionate life, she was condemned to a long, dreary, joyless stagnation ! Oh, how cruel and unjust the universe seemed ! A blind, deaf fate ruling all ; nothing to appeal to—nothing to pray to—all the agony of her bleeding heart of no account or significance, except to her own sense of suffering ! All was purposeless, objectless, bewildering misery !

The teaching of her aunt, and exhortation to trust a

Heavenly Father, who afflicts in wisdom, and pities His children, and hears them when they call upon Him:—all this belief, which had hitherto built up her courage, and lain at the bottom of her sorrow, was now swept away, and seemed a wild mocking fancy. A black, frightful atheism fell upon her soul. Where was God, that she should believe in him? The horror of desolation fell upon her; she was alone, and her own misery was the only reality she could grasp.

But even at this moment the sense of her own suffering faded before the sharp, cold, spiritual darkness which closed round her, killing all faith in the meaning which she had hitherto discerned in life. This struck upon her soul with an ineffable pang, beyond any sorrow that had befallen her. It was the opening of a “lower deep,” which threatened to swallow her down quick. The horror of that moment was unspeakable; she looked round in mad affright: the trees, the fields, the country, the singing-birds, all suddenly seemed to stand out in hard mechanical reality, devoid of any other meaning than what appeared. No, there was no refuge, none; no God, no help, no hope!

She staggered into the garden, and flinging herself upon the damp grass, she shrieked aloud in her despair. She alone, alive and conscious in the midst of a hard, stony, unconscious universe. The mad, unspeakable Fear clove the depths of her soul like lightning; it was not to be endured and live. Stunned and blasted she lay upon the grass: consciousness for a while gave way.

She was at last aroused by Nanny, who had come out to seek her.

“Oh! Miss Constance, what are you doing, to lie there without bonnet or shawl? How can you be so imprudent! You will have caught your death of cold.”

Constance started to her feet with an air of bewilderment.

“Oh! good gracious, Miss Constance, you look dreadful! have you seen a spirit? Come in and go to bed; you are not fit to be up.”

"Oh ! no, I am quite well ; how long have they been gone ?"

"I will tell you what it is," replied the old woman ; "I was with your aunt, who is gone, in all her troubles, and I know the look of them again in you. You are just fretting yourself to death for the sake of a selfish, good-for-nothing, set-up jackanapes—let him be as he is, he is not worth your minding, nor his fine lady-wife (who is no lady at all) either."

A strange smile passed over the face of Constance ; that grief had quite been absorbed in the horror that, like deep sleep, had fallen upon her.

"That is a very little thing, Nanny."

"Well, that is right ; I am glad you can think so ; but now come in-doors and change your things."

Nanny led her like a child into her own room, and made her lie down, enjoining her upon no account to rise until she came to call her. No sooner had the door closed behind old Nanny, than Constance arose from the bed, and scarcely conscious of what she did, knelt down with the instinct of habit, and buried her face in the bed clothes. She uttered no words, but there she knelt in her helplessness and deep need ; the tears fell heavily down her cheeks like strong rain ; they were her only utterance. By degrees the violence of them abated, the calm of exhaustion fell upon her, and she slept.

It was late in the day when she awoke ; the storm had overpast, but it had left her weak and broken.

"Cast me not away from Thy presence,"

rose almost unconsciously from her lips.

The deep dread that had fallen upon her made all other sorrow that the world contained appear as nothing in comparison.

CHAPTER L.

OLD NANNY entered with a cup of warm jelly, and a plate of her own peculiar biscuits, which were as thin and as white as writing paper.

"Dear, dear ; now, Miss Constance, did I not beg of you to lie still. You are not one bit fit to be up ; but drink this before you begin to dress. I expect they will be back before long."

"Oh ! thank you, Nanny, this is very good."

"I am glad of it, darling ; but now keep up your spirits, and do not give in to that conceited, upstart little madam. She will think you are fretting after her husband, for I'll be bound she knows that he came courting to you before ever there was a thought about her ; that fine mincing waiting-maid of hers has been asking me no end of questions about you, but I made short work with her, and begged her to go to her lady's chamber, for that I could not cook with the like of her looking on."

"Well, Nanny, I am all the better for that jelly ; and I will dress now, if you will stop and help me."

"I reckon she will be dressing when she comes ; she is made up of fine clothes ; but, Miss Constance, could you not smarten yourself up a little ? You have plenty of chains and brooches, and I cannot bear to see you put out with her finery."

"No, Nanny, they would not suit mourning, and I dare say she enjoys being better dressed than I am, so why should I hinder her. People do not get much to make them happy in this world."

"Indeed they do not; and it seems to me as if everybody got hold of what does not suit them, and would have made somebody else glad enough. But I will tell you how it is?—those who don't want a thing are sure to have it, and those who want, must not have. Things are queerly ordered in this world."

Old Nanny was not a sceptic, nor a grumbler in general, but she was very indignant to see the manner in which her young lady was treated. She considered Phillip a false-hearted, worthless fellow, quite beneath her mistress; but that did not prevent her being very jealous of his want of attention to her.

"Miss Constance, you look just perished. I doubt you caught a cold. You must wrap yourself well up. You can wear this scarf, it will keep you warm." And Nanny unwrapped a sumptuous crimson Cashmere scarf, which she put carefully round Constance. She did not leave her until she had pulled the most comfortable easy chair close to the fire, and seen Constance seated in it; and even then she lingered about the room, unwilling that she should be left alone.

The riding party did not arrive until it was quite dusk. Their ride had been extended to show Mrs. Phillip more of the country, and to call upon the family at Willesdale Chase, who were old friends of Charles Herbert's, and distant connections of Mrs. Phillip's.

Of course, no dinner could be thought of until Mrs. Phillip had adorned herself to her heart's content. On this day it pleased her to affect a pretty rustic simplicity, and at the end of three-quarters of an hour, she made her appearance in white muslin, trimmed with blue ribbon, and white roses in her hair.

She was in high spirits, and a very good temper. A fashionable, portionless girl like herself might well be delighted to find herself possessed of a beautiful estate, in

addition to all the *éclat* of being a bride, and all the flattery and admiration which her husband and father-in-law had lavished upon her. Her vain little head was completely turned. She entered the parlour, where Constance was dreamily waiting, with a mincing affectation of amiability.

"Are we not shameful people to have kept away so long! What have you done with yourself all the day? Phillip and I were wondering whether any one would have made a descent upon the house, and carried you and old Nanny off to America! But what a superb scarf! Where did you get it?"

She appeared to think it quite impossible that Constance could possess any thing valuable or handsome. Her tone of surprise was much what it would have been if she had discovered the same article in the possession of her maid. She could not endure to see anyone else possess what she did not.

"Oh, Phillip!" she cried, in a childish, petted voice; "I must have a Cashmere scarf like this. I cannot exist without one."

Phillip did not appear to hear; but Charles Herbert said, "I am sure Constance will be very glad to give you hers, since you admire it. It is one I brought from India myself long ago."

Constance made no reply to this proposal; and Mrs. Phillip, though she looked covetously at the costly scarf said, "Oh! I could not think of robbing Constance; it is too precious for one woman to give to another."

The summons to dinner cut short the conversation, which had reached a somewhat embarrassing point. After dinner, the evening passed much as the previous one had done, in that Mrs. Phillip engrossed all the talk and all the attention. Charles Herbert, however, instead of sitting down to *écarté*, devoted himself to her, paying her the most assiduous attentions, and flattering her with a timid deprecating air, as if he were endeavouring to pay his court to some one who had power to harm him greatly.

Phillip took a book, and seemed inclined to sleep; but Mr. Marchmont addressed himself to Constance, which his fair daughter-in-law no sooner perceived, than she contrived to claim and engross all his notice, throwing Constance completely in the shade, as though she were a young woman allowed to sit in the parlour on sufferance.

This behaviour did not mortify Constance to-night: she was quite indifferent to it; neither did Phillip's neglect cause her any heartache,—*that* nerve had (at least for the present) ceased to quiver. But she was greatly troubled by her father's strange and, as it appeared to her, undignified behaviour. It was so unworthy of his age and position; and Mrs. Phillip received his attention with an impertinent, careless politeness, which scarcely veiled her contempt and indifference. The more assiduously Charles thought to flatter her, the more indifferent the lady became.

At length she rose, with a slight yawn, and said, "I daresay it would amuse you, Constance, to look at my jewels, and some of the beautiful presents I was telling you about. Phillip, darling, if you will ring, Dawson shall bring my dressing-case, and I can pack it at the same time, as we start so early to-morrow."

The dressing-case was brought, and Mrs. Phillip displayed, with affected indifference, all the glittering ornaments she possessed, with the names of all the fine people who had presented them, Charles Herbert listening and admiring with an anxious imbecility of face that struck Constance very painfully.

"There are many beautiful jewels here," said he, bowing with old-fashioned gallantry; "but, in my opinion, the owner is the greatest gem of them all."

He so evidently desired to propitiate her, that it was painful to see so young a girl treat him with insolent indifference; it bespoke such a cold, hard nature lying underneath those superficial smiles.

"I hope I shall have better fortune with my jewels," said she, as she began to replace them in their white satin cases, "than the poor dear Marchioness of Tyrallow."

You must know that she is just the very ugliest old woman in the world, and as miserly as she is ugly, Her diamond necklace was superb; but then her neck, when she wore it, was so red and wrinkled, that one could think of nothing but Sinbad's expedient for making the Rocs descend to the Valley of Diamonds! She had a star-shaped ornament of sapphires which was especially magnificent; it used to hang as a pendant upon her capacious bosom. There was a Maltese cross of rubies, the like of which has seldom been seen, and a tiara set with all manner of the very finest stones, besides no end of other ornaments. With all these fine things, she was a stingy, miserable old woman, who used to practise the most absurd hardships and economies. If she would only have sold her least little diamond, she might have lived sumptuously to her life's end, but she could never have found it in her heart to spend the money.

"Well, only imagine her despair when all these fine jewels were stolen in one night, no one knows how, and not the slightest trace has ever been discovered of them, from that time to this. They vanished so completely and mysteriously that they might all have been dissolved, like Cleopatra's pearl. No suspicion fell on any one in particular, and so far as can be ascertained, they have never been offered for sale. That great bank robbery took place about the same time, which has never been discovered either. If the old Marchioness would only have offered a fine reward, it would have brought some tidings of them; but, would you believe it, that wretched old woman could not be induced to offer any specific sum; she thought the reward offered by the bank would serve her purpose as well. For, she said, when those concerned in the bank robbery were discovered, those who stole her jewels would not be far off; the consequence is, that she has kept her money and lost her jewels, which were worth a king's ransom."

During this history, Charles Herbert exhibited great signs of discomfort, and moved listlessly about the

room in a manner quite inconsistent with his previous devoted attention to every word that fell from her lips, and was, in fact, quite impolite. Before she had concluded, he began to stir the fire furiously, and upset the fender and fire-irons with a crash extremely startling. Everybody made an exclamation of surprise. A stop was effectually put to the conversation, for Mrs. Phillip, in her alarm, snapped the string of a pearl bracelet, and the beads went rolling in all directions upon the floor, and, of course, every one was called upon to assist in recovering them, which occupied until bed-time. Contrary to his usual habits, Charles Herbert retired also, instead of remaining for a time with Mr. Marchmont.

Constance was thankful to be alone, but she was too thoroughly worn out to feel at once disposed to retire to bed, and wrapping herself in her dressing-gown, she sat down in a large easy-chair, until she should recover a little energy.

She was aroused by a soft, timid knock at her door, which was repeated the moment after with a suppressed impatience. She rose to open it in some alarm, and found her father.

He made her a sign to be silent, and came in, carefully closing the door after him with mysterious caution.

"Are you ill? is anything the matter?" she said, anxiously.

"Hush! no, nothing. Only I wish to consult you what we ought to do about Mrs. Phillip."

"What of her? does she need anything?"

"No," replied Charles, in a solemn whisper, placing his candle-stick upon the dressing-table, and looking with a sort of embarrassment at his daughter. "But do you not think that we ought to make her some present? it seems to me that she expects it, and it will conciliate her. My dear child, we must conciliate her; it is of the greatest consequence; and I thought if you were to give her your Indian scarf that she admired, it would be suitable."

"I have not the least desire to conciliate Mrs. Phillip.

There is no reason why she is to be conciliated, except that she is very disagreeable and ill-bred, which, as she is to go away to-morrow, is of little consequence. That Indian scarf belonged to my mother, and I shall certainly not give it away to Mrs. Phillip."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" said Charles, in a whimper; "and you refuse to give up that scarf to save your poor old father from danger, perhaps from ruin; how cruel and ungrateful you are; I never expected such conduct from you."

"If it were to do you any good, I would give up anything I possess, and that you know quite well, but I shall not give anything as a bribe to Mrs. Phillip; it would, besides, be entirely useless. If she can cause us any annoyance, and if she feels disposed to use her power, she will not be withheld by gratitude for a scarf, or for any other gift that could be bestowed. You are quite mistaken if you fancy she is a woman to be 'conciliated.' Besides, what is it she can do to harm us?"

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! you are so violent. Why do you speak so cross to me? I am your father, and you ought to obey me. I *will* be obeyed," said Charles, in a tone of querulous complaint.

"I have no intention to be either cross or violent, but I wish to know what it is that you fear from Mrs. Phillip? Can you not trust me?"

"That I know best—she can do us the greatest harm, and we must conciliate her, I tell you—she can. Oh, dear! how very obstinate you are. She can drive us out of this house to-morrow, if she chooses."

Charles spoke this in a nervous desperation, and looked anxiously at Constance to see how she took it.

"Who gave her the power? and since when has it ceased to be your own house?"

"That is not your concern; I will not be questioned; it was for your good—all intended for your good, and you fly out upon me in this manner! Oh, dear! oh, dear! I wish I were dead; I wish I had never been born!" and he began to wring his hands in an excited manner.

Constance looked at him with anxious alarm, he

appeared to be at once so feeble and so vehement. She endeavoured to soothe him, and asked no questions that were likely to touch on painful subjects, for she ascribed all his dread of Mrs. Phillip to a morbid idea which he had taken up, as he was constantly taking up others. She tried to persuade him to go to bed, promising to think over his proposal before morning, and begged him to let her assist him to undress.

Gradually he became more calm, but he would not allow her to go near his room; and the very proposal seemed to excite such terrible fear in his mind, that she desisted; and having with some difficulty prevailed on him to take some medicine which had been prescribed for these occasions of nervous terror, she persuaded him to retire to his own room.

A painful sense of anxiety pressed upon her mind; she felt that trouble was nigh at hand, although she was completely in the dark as to its nature, or the quarter whence it was to arise. It completely withdrew her thoughts from her own personal sorrow. Full of vague forebodings, and in deep depression of spirits, she at length lay down in bed: all mental energy or vitality seemed extinct within her; she fancied she was too miserable to sleep, but utterly weary and exhausted, she fell into a slumber, through which she was still conscious of being very miserable; and her anxiety took the shape of an endless argument,—the continuation of her interview with her father,—which she was obliged to pursue the whole night without arriving at any conclusion.

The next morning she rose early; she scarcely needed to awake. Breakfast had been ordered an hour before the usual time, as Phillip and his wife were to depart immediately afterwards. Before she was dressed, a message was brought from her father to beg she would come into his room.

She found him in bed: ill, and very low. He was in such a state of bodily and mental prostration as to be quite unable to rise. He was terrified at the idea of seeing Mrs. Phillip again, and he had sent for Constance

to entreat her to protect him, and to keep Mrs. Phillip out of his room if she should wish to bid him good-bye. There was something pitiful in this abject, cowardly shrinking from the sight of a young girl; but Constance was alarmed at the change that had come over him in the course of a night: his face looked shrunk, and he seemed many years older than on the previous day. An expression of anxious imbecility marked his countenance and attitude: he seemed to be breaking up.

“Be everything that is attentive and polite to Mrs. Phillip, for me; do not let her be offended, but tell her I am ill. You must protect me, Constance, and you must conciliate her. I shall not be here long to be a charge to anyone. Don’t let me be turned out of this house before I am dead, and then it does not matter what becomes of me.”

He spoke in the childish, whining voice so distressing to listen to in the aged.

Constance tried to pacify him—promised to keep Mrs. Phillip away if she proposed to come, and said she would send Nanny to sit with him. When he was a little calmer she left him, and went down stairs, resolved to obtain some insight into the mysterious power which Mr. Marchmont held over their destinies.

CHAPTER LI.

THERE was not the least danger that Mrs. Phillip would persecute Charles Herbert with any polite attentions. She and her husband had had a pretty sharp quarrel, the remains of which were not dispersed when they assembled at the breakfast-table. Mrs. Phillip looked exceedingly cross. All the thin sugar of smiling sweetness had quite disappeared. She was almost ugly, and showed how little attraction she would possess after the first bloom of gratified vanity had worn off.

She was rude to her father-in-law, rude to Constance, snappish to her husband, and occupied the whole of breakfast-time in declaring they should be too late for dinner at her grandfather's, and wishing that they had gone yesterday.

Phillip looked sulky and annoyed at her childish pertinacity, but ate his breakfast in silence. Mr. Marchmont looked on with his impassible stony eyes, and spoke in his softest voice, but made no attempt to divert the subject.

Phillip had lost this his first quarrel; not that he particularly cared for the subject of it, but it was the first shock his self-complacency had ever received.

The quarrel had begun, like so many others, quite by accident. He had said, whilst shaving, that it would only be polite in them to ask Constance and her father to come and see them some time. Mrs. Phillip chose to

resent this as a high breach of her privileges to invite whom she pleased, and as a sign that he was still in love with that half-mad girl, who, besides, did not move in the position of life in which she chose to make her acquaintance. She exhibited all the resources which a shrewish tongue and a malicious temper can give to a cunning, artful woman.

Phillip's experience in such warfare was—nothing; and for the present time he bowed beneath the torrent of words he had unluckily called forth. He was much afraid lest his wife should embarrass him by some gratuitous and undisguised insolence to Constance; and he made his peace as well as he could, by declaring that he never wanted to see Constance again, and that he had only intended what he proposed as a matter of form. But Mrs. Phillip was in an ill-humour, and would not cede its privileges a moment sooner than she pleased.

She left the table without apology as soon as she had finished her own breakfast. Phillip appeared a little relieved. He had the grace to feel ashamed of his wife's rudeness, and inquired from Constance after her father more in the old style of their intercourse, and expressed a lame sort of hope that they might see her when they should be settled in their new home.

But it was too late; Constance was no longer to be charmed with looks and tones. She had entered upon deeper anxieties than any that concerned him.

The chaise came to the door. Mrs. Phillip tripped down, fully equipped for her journey; her maid followed, laden with the innumerable objects that filled the carriage whenever her mistress chose to travel. The boxes had all been packed upon the chaise, the dressing-case with all its treasures was safely bestowed, and then Mrs. Phillip found a moment to take leave of her hostess, which she did much as though she had been leaving an inn.

“Good-bye, Miss Herbert. You have given us a pleasant visit. I fear we have given you much trouble. I shall never pass this way without calling. I hope your father will soon be better.”

She was busy gathering up the folds of her rich silk dress, and stepping into the chaise; both her hands were engaged, which might be the reason why she did not offer to shake hands with Constance; and when she was seated, she was so much occupied in arranging all her things, that she never looked at her. Mr. Marchmont she had already embraced with the affected *empressement* of a dutiful daughter. Phillip said, "Good-bye, Constance," and sprang in after his wife; the directions were given to the post-boys, the door was shut, and the chaise drove under the old archway, carrying with it all the hopes and dreams that had lighted up the life of poor Constance! Yes; she was now entirely without any illusion or hope about Phillip or about his wife. She did not regret it; but she felt very bare and joyless among the realities that were left, and amongst which she was imprisoned, with no hope of escape. Her love of Phillip had gone away out of her life; it was not Phillip that she regretted—it was the habit of loving which had suddenly been suppressed.

But there was her conference with Mr. Marchmont. He was preparing to walk away towards the fields. She ran after him and called him back. She must know the worst that was hanging over her.

He turned, and looked surprised as he heard her voice.

"Is it anything I can do for you? or that you wish to say to me?" he asked, in his quiet, suppressed voice.

"If you would only give me a few minutes' conversation."

He bowed, and turned back with her.

"Oh! Mr. Marchmont, will you tell me the worst at once? What is it that my father fears? What is your hold over him, that you have the power to turn us out of this house, which I thought was ours? I only heard from Mrs. Phillip, accidentally, that it was settled upon her as her 'dower house.'"

Mr. Marchmont looked at her for a moment, and paused; then, apparently making a resolution, he said,—

"It is best you should know everything, as your father every day becomes more unfit for business. He

parted with this property to me, many years ago, for a sum of ready money and an annuity. It was then agreed he should keep possession of the house for the term of his natural life. Subsequently, more money was advanced, on condition that he would yield possession whenever I chose to claim it. Mrs. Phillip wishes to have the house altered, and fitted up for a summer residence. I spoke about it to your father, yesterday."

"But you will never turn him out of the house which had been his own so long?" cried Constance, "and for the mere whim of Mrs. Phillip."

"Business is business," replied Mr. Marchmont, in a dry, imperturbable manner. "I purchased the right of possession at a moment's warning. He brought his ruin on himself."

"But how? I fancied he had a large income."

"Possibly. He gambled, and would have been disgraced had I not assisted him; but the evil day is come at last, and the sooner you remove him the better. You have your own house still; take him home and watch him well. He will not recover here."

"How soon do you wish to drive us away?"

"I will give you a month. The sooner it is done the better, depend upon it."

"But, Mr. Marchmont, do you know what it is you are saying? to leave the Chauntry in a month! it will kill my father. I cannot believe you serious."

"Your father has had money,—an ample consideration—it is only just he should go. Have you anything further to say to me? I shall be happy to render you any assistance that is in my power. You had better break it to your father without delay. I cannot lose the worth of my money."

He spoke in a low, suppressed, quiet tone,—there was not the slightest inflection in his voice, nor any look of speculation in his eyes, which were like surfaces of slate, without depth or lustre in them. His face was stupid and impassible. All the interest he had ever allowed himself to feel in Constance, now that she was no longer included in the group of his own personal relationships,

was gone, and transferred to the woman who had become his son's wife. Constance was now a mere item in his business transactions with her father, and he would have seen her turned into the streets with as little emotion as he would have seen a heap of dust and plaster cast out from a house he had ordered to be taken down.

The man had contracted this mode of viewing all human feelings that might suffer in the enforcement of his rights and claims in the way of business; naturally cold-hearted and intensely selfish, he had now become utterly passionless and insensible to pity or sympathy. He had no ill-will to Constance, and nothing but contempt for her father. His manners had always been reserved and quiet, and Constance saw no difference in them at this moment than when he had been most friendly; and this monotonous quietness was more terrible than any violence could have been.

"But, Mr. Marchmont," said Constance, rousing herself after the stupified pause that followed his last words, "you surely are not going away thus? I cannot speak to my father, nor show that I have any cognizance of his transactions with you. From you the communication must come. He will feel less humiliated. As a matter of business, it ought not to come from me."

"I have no objection; he is in his bed-room, you say. I will go now."

He turned from her, and entered the house; their conversation had taken place beside the gateway, where she had stopped him. Constance remained like one in a bad dream. She looked round at the old house with its gables and quaint chimneys, at the farm-yard, and the Lime-tree Walk beyond, as if they were seen in a mirror. She could not believe that what she had heard within the last few moments was true, or that it ever could come to pass. She every moment expected something to awaken her. She walked slowly to the house, and went through into the garden, and sat dreamily down upon a bench beneath the sitting-room window. In a short time she was rejoined by Mr. Marchmont, who appeared as much discomposed as his nature would allow.

"How was your father when you left him this morning? Did you notice anything remarkable about him?"

"Nothing, except that he seemed very low and nervous, as though he was afraid of something."

"Well, he is mad now—quite mad. If I did not know him to be a strictly temperate man, I should say he had *delirium tremens*. You must have a keeper for him. You cannot manage him alone. Who has seen him this morning besides yourself?"

"No one but Nanny, when she took his breakfast."

"Has anything happened to frighten him? Has he had any letters? There is some mystery at the bottom of it. I found him sitting on the floor with his back against the wall, raving that no one should enter. He was very violent, and I had great difficulty in making him recognise me; then he crept back to bed quietly enough. But it cannot go on, you must have a keeper for him. He may break out again any minute, and do himself or someone else a mischief. Is there anyone about the farm who could be brought in to attend on him?"

"I will go to him," said Constance, quietly; "I am not afraid. He will be made worse by the sight of a stranger. He cannot endure anyone to enter his room."

"So, so. Well, he must be removed as soon as possible. You cannot keep him in your own house; he had better be taken to an asylum."

"There is no one in the world to care for him but me; and now that the doom is come upon him, I will attend upon him until it overtakes me also."

Constance spoke with a patient despair that might have touched anyone who beheld her. She seemed to be quite alone in the world, and no one to care what she did.

Mr. Marchmont was thinking how this new incident would interfere with his plans.

"That is mere romance. You have no legal claim upon me; but in this respect, I shall take upon me to act as your guardian. I am going to London on other business. I think I know a suitable person to assist in

taking charge of your father until some final arrangement can be made. You are too young to turn your own home into a mad-house."

"I never will consent to his going elsewhere. My home is his, so long as he lives."

"If he should be violent," continued Mr. Marchmont, as though she had not spoken, "a couple of the farm-servants should be at hand. I will see to that. Do not manifest any alarm, if you can help it."

Constance, though with a beating heart and sickening dread, entered her father's room, but with entire composure of manner. She had expected to see she knew not what, and was inexpressibly relieved to find him lying quietly in bed.

"Ah, Constance! is it you? I thought you would never come. What has old Marchmont been telling you? I frightened him famously, I think. He won't come here again in a hurry."

"He says he is going to London in half-an-hour. The horses are being saddled now."

"Going to London is he?" cried Charles Herbert, joyfully. "That is right; a good riddance of him! Are you sure he is going?"

"Quite sure. I hear the sound of the horses now in the yard."

"Go and see him off, and bring me word when he is really gone. I will not believe it until you tell me."

Constance thought it best to humour him, and went away accordingly. She found Nanny in great agitation and terror, but quieted her by saying that her father seemed much as usual, and that she believed he had only been playing a trick on Mr. Marchmont to drive him away. She spoke as cheerfully as she could. There was no time to tell Nanny the other intelligence which had come upon her that morning, it would take some time to communicate. Mr. Marchmont and his groom had departed, and she must return to her father.

When he found that the man he feared was really gone, the change that passed over him was indescribable. His abject terror passed away, and he became like a

child delivered from the fear of punishment, quite quiet and gentle. He refused, however, to get up, and would not have Constance out of his sight for a moment. He talked to her rationally, and seemed to be relieved that she at length knew that the Chauntry was passed away from them. He entered into excuses for his conduct, and it seemed a great relief to speak upon the subject. He declared that the desire to rehabilitate her fortune had been his chief inducement to gamble, and repeated again and again that it was for her sake.

Only one thing struck Constance as strange. He talked a great deal, and without any of the reserve which was habitual to him; but behind all that he communicated so freely, there lurked something else. Once or twice he appeared to approach it and then left it. The two things taken together made her fear that there was something amiss with him, but he was so submissive and gentle, so different to what she had feared, that, combined with the immense relief of having lost their visitors, she felt almost happy.

Every hour that passed increased her confidence in herself, and in the consciousness that she was gaining an ascendancy over her father. She believed, too, that she now knew the worst that hung over them, and it was a relief from the dull, vague presentiment that had haunted her in spite of her day dreams. She experienced the fact that realities, however sombre or painful, have a certain strength in them that is better than all the enervating sweetness of dreams and hopes.

During the afternoon her father slept a little, and she wrote to Mrs. Harrop a detailed account of the events of the last few days, events which seemed to place the gulf of many years betwixt her and her past life.

At night she retired to rest at her usual hour; her father seemed quite well, and to wish it. But the next morning he was worse; much excited, and muttering a great deal to himself; extremely restless; making violent incoherent exclamations from time to time, as if under the dominion of some painful thought. It had struck him in the night, that Marchmont suspected the

secret of his possessing those jewels, and had gone to town to give information, and would return with officers of justice to search the house. All grew clear and plausible as he dwelt on this idea. He grew entirely to believe it, and in the morning he was nearly in a brain fever, from the incessant working of his thoughts as to what he should say, and how he should act when they arrived.

Constance and Nanny persuaded him to get up, which, for a time, dissipated his black spectres, but they returned again and again; not as things he positively believed, but they seemed probable. He had so much reason to fear the worst, that he began to believe his own imaginations.

Mr. Marchmont did not return the next day, which was a respite to every one, and Charles began to be more composed. His reason was vacillating, but it was not yet overthrown. He slept well that night, and awoke the next morning quite able to discern the difference between mountains and clouds. But he appeared to cling to Constance as his only protection from some dread uncertain danger, and he would not suffer her to leave him for an instant.

The evening of the third day Mr. Marchmont returned, and brought with him a young man of about six and twenty; depressed, shy, and slightly deformed. His long straight hair was dry and pale; his face had a painful expression of suffering and suppressed emotion, but with all this there was a look of intellect and cultivation.

CHAPTER LII.

THAT night, after she had at length attained the haven of her own room, harassed and worn out by the incidents of the day, Constance, too weary to undress herself, sat down in the large chair that had belonged to her aunt.

No longer called upon for exertion, all the difficulties that surrounded her came thronging before her, black and shadowy as the flickering fantastic shadows that the fire-light sent into the corners of the room and upon the walls, from the quaint old furniture.

The sense of her own helplessness crushed her down; she felt, too, so ignorant of what she ought to do as regarded her father. That his mind was failing, had been failing for some time past, was now evident. She had no one at hand to whom she might turn for counsel or assistance; she stood alone in the world, but it was no vain self-pity that touched her; if she had only known the right thing and the best thing to do, she had plenty of courage to follow it out in action.

Almost unconsciously, she wondered that Phillip should so completely have vanished from her thoughts; but it was not of herself that she was thinking, but only how she could do right in this new and terrible emergency of her father's breaking-up. Suddenly, like a black veil falling upon her, came the deep gloom of the dreadful thought that had struck her that day in the garden:

IF there were *no* God? *no* Heavenly Father! Again that doubt shivered to the depth of her soul, the very earth seemed to be moved from beneath her feet.

It was no theological difficulty, no pride of intellect, but a deep, black, insane disbelief that cut her life away from its anchorage, and left her drifting in darkness and the shadow of death. She had always had a strong, natural piety, a childlike confidence in prayer: as a child might go to its father, it was her instinct and consolation in all her grievances.

As to the doctrines which she had been taught, it had never occurred to her to doubt them, or that they could be doubted. Morbid scepticism, or aspirations to find some other rule of life, were not the fashion in that day, and had never been suggested to her by any influence from without. She desired no respite from the stern duties under which she had to lead her life. Poor child, it was strength, not respite, that her soul wanted; and instead of Life, the shadow of Death had fallen upon her. Intellectual scepticism has a certain pride of life, the active exercise of the power of mind—searching out and satisfying “obstinate questionings” which will take no denial. It is a course of intellectual exercise—healthful, necessary even to certain natures—but to Constance it was dreadful. She sat cowering in the chair, with her face hidden in her hands, every nerve quivering with the “terror that made her afraid.” She was powerless to fight against it, for it could not be grappled with by any reason or wisdom of her own. The agony of the moment was terrible; she uttered no words, but surely every breath was a dumb cry for help; and the help came.

Constance started, threw back the long hair that had fallen over her face and shoulders, and raised her head as a sudden thought flashed upon her.

“Surely,” she exclaimed aloud, “I am going mad! and this is the shape the madness takes in me! This thought is not *true*, then, it is only *MAD*!”

The intense relief that followed to the poor child, as this solution to her terrible doubt occurred to her, would be difficult to describe; it satisfied her at once; she knew

that madness hung over her life, and now she had obtained a glimpse of what it really meant, but the fear of going mad was as nothing compared with the strange and terrible question that had covered her soul with its blackness.

She once more endeavoured to arrange what she had to do on the morrow, but her physical strength was exhausted. She began to doze, and at last recognised that the first thing that needed to be done by her, was to go to bed and fall asleep as fast as she could. It is a motherly provision of nature, that

“The blessed barrier betwixt day and day,”

generally gives us a pause to revive our strength before any great strain upon our faculties.

The next morning she awoke quite ready to meet whatever the day might bring forth.

When she descended to breakfast, Mr. Marchmont was alone in the room: he was making some calculation in his note-book, and did not see her.

“Ah!” said he, looking up as he returned the book to his pocket, “I hope I see you well. How is your father this morning?”

“I scarcely know; he refuses to get up; but he is quite rational, and seems calmer. He is much perplexed why you have brought that young man here. What is his name? I did not catch it last night.”

“Scott—Cornelius Scott; you will find him of great use during your father’s removal; you could not manage him yourself.”

“He looks ill, and very unhappy,” said Constance.

“You may say that—he and the world have not hit it together exactly—and the world being the stronger of the two, it has gone pretty hard with him. His father was the manager of that bank which was robbed some eighteen months ago. His room was discovered to be on fire: suspicion fell upon him that he had connived at the robbery, and set his private room on fire to conceal the fact. The evidence told against him, though I think

he was only a weak fool ; he had nothing to do with the robbery, but he was frightened, and lost his head. I believe he set fire to the place to stop all examination, for fear any suspicion should fall on him. Of course he ran into the danger he feared. He was tried and transported. This son was in an excellent situation in a Government office ; he lost it in consequence of his father's affair, and has been badly enough off ever since ; he has his mother to keep as well as himself. He is a good fellow, but very soft, and fancies that everybody has read his father's trial."

Mr. Marchmont spoke in his low, suppressed, even voice, and his eyes never varied for an instant from their stony, unwavering gaze. He did not add that the young man came to him for next to nothing, and did the work of two clerks.

"Poor young man!" said Constance, compassionately. "I have often wondered what becomes of the rest of a family when the head of it has committed some dreadful crime. It must, I think, be the hardest of all calamities to endure, to have one's name disgraced in a court of justice. I cannot imagine how people survive it."

"Oh, I don't know ; they are soon forgotten, and then they creep about again. But about your father's journey? You had better remove him at once, before he grows worse. He can understand reason as it is, and the quieter it can be done the better."

Constance looked in amaze at the man who could speak thus coolly of the total ruin and uprooting of her father, with whom he had lived on such terms of intimacy for years. Mr. Scott entered the room at that moment, looking timid and unhappy—a chronic unhappiness, that was beyond comfort. Constance spoke to him kindly, and gave him his breakfast. But she did not remain at table ; she went to her father.

She found him in a state of restless impatience, and very anxious to know "who that young man was? and why Marchmont had brought him there? Some scheme of his."

Constance told him what she had heard, and was

shocked and alarmed at the effect it had upon her father.

He cowered beneath the bed-clothes, and the perspiration stood in beads upon his forehead.

"He shall not come here," said he. "I won't see him. Keep him away from me!"

"But, my father, we must leave this house; and I cannot send away the young man; he belongs to Mr. Marchmont."

"I tell you, Constance, it will kill me to leave this house. Marchmont took advantage of me. He made an iniquitous bargain. He dare not go into a court of law; and I will defy him."

He spoke in a hard, excited voice, and with violence. Constance tried to suggest her house in Yorkshire, and said how much she wished him to see it, and how much she desired to go there herself. But it took no effect. He continued to talk with great excitement, and dropped words that alarmed Constance—revealing dimly (even though she believed them the workings of delirium) some guilty mystery that lay in the past of his life, and which was the reason of his opposition to leaving the house.

It was a terrible complication of her anxiety and perplexity. She hoped that it was only a fixed idea—a delusion of his diseased brain; but she had a sickening instinct that there was some foundation for what he said. All her life she had had a dull fear that her father had done something wrong. Even as a little child, he had seemed to her like one suffering the penalty of remorse for some hidden deed. As she grew older she had reasoned the idea away; but now it recurred with the force of a certainty.

"What is it you fear? What is it you have done, father? Tell me, and I will do my best to help you. Of what are you afraid?"

"Afraid? I fear nothing. No one can find aught against me. You forget yourself. I do not understand such language. Go away—go."

A knock came to the door. Old Nanny stood with a

letter in her hand—a letter with a foreign post-mark. It was directed to her father. She hesitated about giving it to him, but he caught it from her hand.

The reading of it agitated him dreadfully. He insisted on being left alone. To pacify him she went away. No sooner had the door closed than he got cautiously out of bed, and began to examine carefully the part of the wall he had built up. To his excited fancy it seemed as though everyone who entered the room must have their attention attracted to this spot, and he heartily wished he had left the room as it was. He began to imagine the dressing-room as he had left it, and what would be found, if the doorway were broken through. All the caution and pains he had expended were forgotten, or were at least vain to reassure him, it was now quite impossible to rectify anything, and all his efforts at concealment seemed like sand running through his fingers, which he was powerless to retain.

Charles Herbert might be a weak, worthless man, but his present sufferings, arising from what was so *nearly* guilt, and which, if discovered, would bring upon him all the ignominy of a crime, were so intense, that his worst enemy must have pitied him. The fear, the helplessness, the horrible anxiety, dissolved his whole nature into abject cowardice. All his bones seemed out of joint; his strength was as water; his arms fell powerless, and every nerve was unstrung; a horrible sickness possessed him; he walked with hasty, staggering steps about the room, his knees refusing to support his weight. If he could only have got through the wall to see how things were! But there was nothing he could do.

He attempted to drag a heavy press to put before the book-case with which he had already barricaded the entrance to the fatal closet, but his eager and trembling fingers seemed to melt away like snow whenever they tried to grasp it. A knock that came to the door sounded to his ears like the thunder of doom. After a pause, which seemed to him an interminable suspense, Constance came softly in, bringing a basin of hot tea. There was nothing terrible in her looks, but the wretched

man hid his face, and uttered a cry of startled, despairing fear, like an animal brought to bay.

Constance spoke gently; but he did not listen. Whilst she was endeavouring to rouse his attention, she was again called out by old Nanny, who beckoned to her with mysterious vehemence.

"There is a fellow down stairs, who is just come. He says he *must* see the master. An ill looking chap as ever you could see. What must be done?—what had we best do?"

"I don't know, indeed. Where is Mr. Marchmont?"

"He is gone out, and that Stranger fellow along with him."

"I will go down myself, and see if he will tell me his business."

"And I will stop with master and see if I can get him back to bed: he is as cold as a robin."

Constance found a hard-featured, sinister-looking man standing before the fire, neither clean nor respectable in his attire—a kind of man not to be readily asked to sit down in any house where business or ill-luck brought him. Constance instinctively drew back. What could such a man as this have to say to her father?

"My father is ill—can see no one. Will you tell me your business?" said she, in a severely composed manner.

"No, my young lady; I cannot tell you my errand. Your father would not thank me for doing so. I must see him, and at once."

"But he is ill, in a fever—he is not quite himself. Indeed, he cannot receive you."

"He has had a letter this morning, has he not?"

"He has."

"And been worse since, perhaps?"

"He was ill before."

"I know all that ails him. He will be better after I have spoken to him. Show me to his room at once."

"But indeed it will be dangerous. It may kill him to be startled with the sight of a stranger!"

"All nonsense; and, besides, if it were to kill him, as

you call it, twice over, I still must see him! Show me to his room, or I shall find it for myself."

"Let me at least go and prepare him?"

"No, no; better not. He would be barring the door, and then we should have to break it open, and make the devil of a noise. I will go now."

Constance wished to gain time, until the farm servants came to their dinner; but the stranger put her on one side, and proceeded, without further parley, up stairs. The first door he opened was the door of Charles's bedroom. He opened it without knocking; Charles was in querulous altercation with Nanny; the curtain of the bed concealed him. The stranger paused; but only for an instant, and passed at once into the full light, standing like a spectre before the scared and excited vision of Charles!

In an instant his weakness was gone! Uttering a cry like a savage beast, he sprang upon the stranger's throat, and flung him to the ground; his head in the fall struck heavily against the sharp corner of the heavy oak press, which Charles had just dragged from its place.

The stranger, without a cry or groan, lay like one dead!

Constance and Nanny gave a cry of horror; and Charles Herbert seemed suddenly startled to consciousness of what he had done.

CHAPTER LIII.

BEFORE the shock of fear and astonishment which such a scene caused could subside, Mr. Marchmont entered the room. His imperturbable calm did not seem disturbed in the least. He went up to the prostrate man, and turned over his face.

Apparently it was not strange to him; for he said, quietly,—“Ah, indeed. How came he here at this time?” Then, addressing Constance, he desired her to summon the farmer and a couple of his servants to remove the man. “And you,” said he to John Scott, who had followed him on hearing the noise of the scuffle, but who lingered timidly at the door, not knowing whether to enter or not, “you will attend to him, and dress the cut in his head. It looks ugly enough; but I do not think he will die of it—nothing short of hanging ever kills such rascals! Will you,” said he, speaking to Nanny, “see that some place is prepared for him?—a hay-loft will be quite good enough. He can do no harm just at present; but when he comes to himself a little, your silver spoons will not be safe if he comes in their way.”

He spoke in the quietest manner, as if he were issuing the most ordinary directions; but he looked aside, for the sight of the blood that had flowed from the wound in the man’s head, made him feel uncomfortable. He could have killed anyone who crossed his plans or stood

in his way, with perfect indifference; but he could not endure the sight of a cut finger.

The farmer and two of his labourers came hastily to the room at the summons of Constance, looking stupidly curious. They were followed by the farmer's wife and the maid-servants, who began to ejaculate in different keys of wonder and horror; but they were speedily silenced by Mr. Marchmont, who sternly desired them not to be fools, but to go and fetch a bucket of water to clean the boards.

All he directed was done in an incredibly short time, for no one ever disobeyed Mr. Marchmont; there was a tone in his suppressed, quiet voice, which made people feel that it would be better for them to do what he ordered. When the room was once more cleared—for even Constance had been sent away, to look for linen and bandages—Mr. Marchmont walked up to the bed, where Charles Herbert lay cowering under the bed-clothes, trembling, and not daring to look up. Mr. Marchmont stripped them down. Charles Herbert writhed like one touched suddenly with a burning iron, and endeavoured to hide his face.

"Now, tell me the meaning of all this. How comes that man here, and why did you try to kill him?"

Charles felt Mr. Marchmont's eyes upon him. They compelled him to raise his head and reply to him.

"I am sure I don't know," he whimpered. "Do not look so dreadfully at me. He is a bad man, and came to threaten me. Do tell me you will protect me."

"We will see about that afterwards. Tell me first why he came to threaten you. This letter will tell me, perhaps."

He took the crumpled paper that was clutched tightly in one of Charles's hands. It contained very few lines, but they were sufficient to explain all that had occurred. The letter was dated from America.

"SIR,—The bank having offered a fresh reward of one thousand pounds for any information touching the great robbery a year-and-half ago, this comes to say, that if

you pay me that sum, I will not endeavour to obtain the same by giving the information I possess. A friend of mine (one you have had dealings with before now) will wait upon you and make arrangements for receiving the money.

“I am, your well-wisher,

“J. M.

“Mr. Charles Herbert.”

“So, my old acquaintance, John Maryland—a precious scoundrel—and this friend of his, with whom you have had dealings, has ventured his neck in a noose by coming here,—he must have expected something more than his share of the reward. How came you connected with them? You had better tell me at once.”

Mr. Marchmont was really surprised, and very desirous to hear the facts, but nothing except a cold, peremptory indifference could be discerned in his tone.

“I did not rob the bank. I knew nothing about it,” whined Charles, turning about uneasily, to escape from the inquisition of those cold, passionless eyes, which were fixed upon him.

“How came you to have any dealings with these men, and what have you done that puts you in their power?”

“Nothing, nothing,—I swear I have done nothing, and they will hang me. Oh! what must I do?”

“Tell me where the money and the jewels are concealed,” replied Mr. Marchmont, with that perspicacity of insight into things that had made his fortune in life. “If you did not join in the robbery, you have received some of the proceeds, and concealed your knowledge, which makes you an accomplice. My good friend, you have been a great fool, and in attempting to deceive me, you are only adding to your danger. Tell me exactly all that has happened.”

Charles Herbert’s senses appeared to be melting away in abject terror; and he seemed incapable of comprehending what was said to him; but Mr. Marchmont’s will concentrated for a moment his scattered faculties, and he gave a tolerably clear account of the transaction

by which he became the luckless possessor of such fatal treasure.

"And where is it now?" asked Mr. Marchmont, as Charles concluded. But that secret was the very core of his life;—he was entirely unable to utter it. He fell into a violent fit of weeping and trembling, until the bed shook under him. Constance entered the room to ascertain how her father was, and stood in terrified surprise at the condition in which she beheld him.

"Miss Herbert, you had better retire, and keep all others from this chamber. This is no scene for you; leave me to deal alone with your father."

"You are killing him," replied Constance, passionately. "You are driving him to madness by some secret knowledge you possess about him. You see that he cannot resist you; it is worse than murder. You shall not torture him. I will remain, I have the right to do so; and before me you dare not question him, lest I, too, should obtain some knowledge of your ways."

"Miss Herbert, you are excited: the scenes you have witnessed to-day have been too much for you. It is absolutely necessary that your father should reply to my questions. Do not waste your strength in womanish appeals. You will need it all. How is your patient?"

"Constance! Constance! do not leave me," said Charles Herbert, endeavouring to grasp her hand.

"I will not leave you, I will take care of you," she replied, soothingly, smoothing the rumpled pillows and adjusting the bed clothes, as though Mr. Marchmont had not been present.

"Miss Herbert, I must insist upon your withdrawal. You do not know all that is at stake."

"You can tell me; if it concerns my father, it concerns me also."

For the moment Mr. Marchmont was baffled: almost unconsciously to himself, that cold, cynical man shrank from allowing her to see the sordid shabbiness of his soul. He did not wish her to see the profit that he purposed to himself from her father's position. It was a sentiment struggling against a matter of fact.

He walked up and down the room in displeased silence, whilst Constance sat beside her father, endeavouring to soothe and reassure him.

After the lapse of a short time, old Nanny came up, pale and trembling.

"Oh, Miss Constance! Miss Constance! What is to come of all this? There are men from Bow-street down stairs. They are come for the master, and to search the house."

Charles Herbert heard these terrible words, but he neither moved nor spoke,—he was struck with paralysis.

"Mr. Marchmont, look at my father, he is dying!" cried Constance, in an agony of terror.

"So much the better; there is nothing but disgrace, if, indeed, there be not a shameful death before him. You wished to know all. He was connected with the great bank robbery, and the officers are come here, upon information, to search the house for the stolen property."

Mr. Marchmont spoke bitterly; he was excessively annoyed at the turn matters had taken.

He went down stairs to the parlour, where the two officers had already commenced their search.

They were decent-looking men, with determined impassable countenances, of a peculiar cast, and eyes that took in everything around, without appearing to look at anything. They knew Mr. Marchmont, and Mr. Marchmont knew them, extremely well. In a few words he told them all that had occurred, and that in the wounded man they would find the individual they wanted about the robbery, but that neither he nor Charles Herbert were in a condition just then to give any information.

The search began, and was conducted in the most scientific manner, but, of course, not a trace of the stolen property could be discovered. There remained only Charles Herbert's bed-room unsearched, and they proceeded thither. A certain feeling of humanity prompted them to leave that until the last.

John Scott had come at the summons of old Nanny. He was quite unaware of the presence of the officers in

the house until they entered the bed-room ; the distress of Constance and the critical state of her father absorbed his attention. Charles had opened his eyes, and recovered in some measure his senses ; but he could not speak, and the whole of one side was powerless.

"Who, what are these persons, Miss Herbert ? It is as much as your father's life is worth to be disturbed now, and they must not enter."

Constance shook her head.

"They are officers of justice, Mr. Scott, let them do their duty. There is some fatal mystery ; they will find nothing here."

The two men looked at Charles, lying like one already dead, and at Constance. They felt as much pity as men habituated to do their duty and assist justice to take her course could feel, but it did not delay their proceedings for a moment.

"We are sorry to disturb you, Miss, but we are obliged. If you know of any secret place where the old gentleman keeps his money and other matters, it might save time and some disturbance if you were to show us. It will make no difference in the end, for we shall be sure to find it."

"I know nothing of any secret place," said Constance, "and you will find nothing."

But as she spoke, a horrible spasm of recollection came over her. She remembered all the mysterious doings of her father when they first returned to the Chantry,—how he had bricked up the door of his dressing-room,—all the jealousy he had shown of anyone even entering the room—all that had ever struck her as strange in his manner ; and the horrible conviction seized her that it was all connected with this business, and that the officers were on the right track !

All that had vaguely puzzled her about her father had now its explanation, and the fixed idea which, as a child, had associated her father with "some crime committed," took away all surprise from this terrible moment. She knew that all was true !

All strength left her limbs ; they hung loose and

quivering with the keen agony that darted through her. She sunk down upon the bed in a waking trance, knowing all that passed, her senses quickened to a morbid consciousness, but entirely incapable of moving a finger.

The men rapidly examined all the drawers of the wardrobe, ransacked the old-fashioned bureau, and took it dexterously to pieces in search of secret drawers and double boards, but nothing appeared. Every article contained in it was subject to scrutiny. The furniture was examined to see if, by any possibility, anything could be secreted.

At length the officers approached the bed. Charles lay motionless, but his eyes were fixed with painful intentness upon the corner of the room where the bricked-up door was to him quite visible above the bookcase he had placed before it. One of the officers was struck with his look, and followed the direction of it.

"It is somewhere in that corner; see how he tries to look away now we are watching."

"Don't you see that he is dying?" replied the other. "Folks always fix their eyes in that way. I have seen scores die, and they all do so. The property is stitched up in the mattress, depend on it."

"Anyway, let us see what there is in that corner first. He will be dead before we have done. Give him a chance to die in peace if he can."

They moved the heavy bureau, assisted by Mr. Marchmont, who felt an intense curiosity in the result of the search, although he was far from guessing how nearly it affected his own interest.

"There has been a door bricked up here, and no mistake," said one of the men. "It is not bricklayers' work this."

The bricks were speedily removed, and the door, securely fastened, stood revealed.

"We are coming to something now, I should say."

The door soon gave way; and they looked into a small, shallow dressing-room, or "powdering closet," as

it was called, descending a step from the bed-room. It was quite dark, for the window had been bricked up. As their eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, they saw nothing but a very small fireplace, and a cupboard let into the wall, containing only an old empty hat-box. The men looked at each other with rather blank faces; there was not a place where anything could be concealed, and the plentiful cobwebs that covered the walls gave evidence how long they had been undisturbed.

A tin saucepan, covered with rust, and nearly melted into a shapeless mass, attracted Mr. Marchmont's eye. It stood inside the bars, and all were rusty together.

"What is this?" said he, lifting it, and carrying it to the light. He scraped the sides with a knife, and looked at it curiously for some minutes.

"Here is proof, if you need any, there has been either gold or silver, or both, melted in this pot. There is something to be found here, depend on it. Fetch a candle, one of you."

A shining point gleamed from a crevice in the floor, as the candle was held about. It proved to be a small diamond, which had apparently been dropped and trodden in.

"We must take up the boards."

"The boards have never been touched since the house was a house," said Mr. Marchmont. "Look under the hearthstone; it is there a man would hide anything."

"No mason ever laid this hearthstone down, I'll be bound," said the elder officer, who was working energetically with the crowbar.

The stone was prised up, and beneath was disclosed a lump of fused metal, covered with verdigris. A large, leathern bag lay carefully tied up and sealed, and a portfolio, which was nearly falling in pieces with damp. The officers uttered a cry of exultation as they clutched their prey.

Their cry was echoed by another, that proceeded from the bed-room, a dull, inarticulate, discordant sound, as

though from one struggling in nightmare. There was something terribly frightful in it, for the men laid down their prize to look whence it came. Charles Herbert, conscious, but helpless, endeavouring to struggle with his paralysis, had fallen off the bed; his face was so horribly distorted that none of those present dared to look upon him. With the cry they had heard, his spirit passed. Charles Herbert was dead.

John Scott, who had been assisting Nanny and another servant to remove Constance, returned hastily at the sound of that death cry. The officers, accustomed as they were to sights calculated to try the nerves of ordinary men, were struck with horror; and the perspiration stood in beads upon the forehead of Mr. Marchmont, who was ghastly pale; the presence of Death had stilled all the interests of the passing moment.

Mr. Marchmont was the first to recover himself.

"He is quite dead, we have no time to bestow on him; place the body on the bed, and cover it over; no one must enter this room at present."

Mr. Marchmont had a singular horror of death; he would not have lent his assistance in touching the dead body for all the treasures that they had just discovered. He turned his back with a shudder he could not conceal, as the two strong officers lifted the poor emaciated corpse, decently composed the disturbed features, and drew the sheet over them.

"He has made a good escape out of all this."

"Well for him that he has; he has taken his secret where we can never find it."

Mr. Marchmont turned impatiently.

"Come, gentlemen, to business. John Scott, we have found what may concern you; come along."

On opening the leathern bag, all the precious stones were found as Charles had placed them: one ruby and sapphire cross was intact, he had spared it for Constance, when he might give it to her with safety; a label, written in a wavering hand, "To my dear daughter, when I am dead." In the portfolio were the ashes of half-consumed bank notes. Apparently his heart had failed him before

they were destroyed; the numbers, in some instances, had escaped. On comparing them with the advertised list, they were found to correspond. The cross, too, answered to the description in the *Hue and Cry*.

"We have found the right nest and the eggs in it," said one of the officers. "There will be pretty nearly all the property here."

"John Scott," said Mr. Marchmont, "this is the bank property, for the robbery of which your father was so heavy a sufferer; you are in a fair way to have your name set fair again. I always thought him innocent."

The poor young man burst into tears.

"Oh, my God! my God! how I thank Thee."

"I think we may come down stairs now," said Mr. Marchmont, uncasily; "we have left nothing that concerns anyone; we can secure the closet door."

"But, Mr. Marchmont, you will have to come along with us; we cannot lose sight of you."

"What have I to do with all this. I know nothing."

"Possibly not, but read this; you will tell your own story in the right place; but you must come with us now."

Half-hidden in the torn cover of the portfolio, and partially consumed, was a paper, in Charles Herbert's handwriting, containing the words, "Marchmont's share in notes and jewels."

Mr. Marchmont was petrified, as well he might be. There could be no mistake, the words were plainly written; it seemed a diabolical delusion; he knew himself entirely innocent—but how to prove it? The whole fair fabric of his carefully built-up fortune was threatened with ruin through the cunning malignity of a half-insane man.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE officers first ordered themselves a plentiful supply of refreshments, which the length and nature of their recent employment rendered peculiarly acceptable, and then they dispatched a messenger to Chelmsford, for a post-chaise, and a medical man to certify as to the possibility of removing their prisoner.

Mr. Marchmont sat apart, chafing terribly at the new aspect things had taken. He did not for a moment entertain any fears as to the ultimate result to himself; but he knew that in the process of investigation many transactions of his past life would inevitably be exposed which he had carefully shrouded from the light of day. He knew, too,—none better,—that a court of justice has a peculiar aptness for taking the shine of respectability out of even the most innocent events of daily life, and he felt that his dealings with Charles Herbert would bear a very shabby and questionable appearance when exposed in their unadorned reality.

All the beautiful respectability with which he had electrotyped the base metal of his life and proceedings was about to be melted off, and leave a sadly tarnished name and reputation. It was the only Nemesis that could have found him vulnerable, except indeed the loss of his money, which was so carefully invested,

however, as to be secure from anything less than a revolution.

Whilst he was indulging in moody reflections, which effectually ruffled the elaborate calmness he generally maintained under difficulties, old Nanny came trembling into the room. She looked many years older since the previous day. Her head shook as with palsy; all her features were relaxed, and hung loose and feeble; her eyes were red with weeping.

"Oh! Mr. Marchmont," said she, "you surely are not going to leave that poor young thing alone in this house, with nobody to direct or advise her? What is she to do?—what are any of us to do? Who is so fit as yourself to give the orders about the funeral?"

"My good Nanny, these gentlemen will tell you that I am obliged to go with them—that it does not depend upon me to refuse."

"But do you call yourself a Christian, and talk of going away, leaving us to live or die, as it pleases God? The poor master always treated you as his friend, and will you leave him to be unburied like a dog? Who is to order about the burying, if you go away? A heathen would have more regard."

There was something so whimsical in Nanny's appeal, when taken in connection with the actual circumstances, that the officers, albeit not given to seeing the ludicrous state of things, gave a chuckling laugh—not an ill-natured one, for they were really touched at the desolate, forlorn condition of poor Constance, and death had removed Charles Herbert from their charge.

"I tell you what, mistress, it is not altogether out of love and free-will that this gentleman accompanies us, or that we take him,—there is obligation on both sides; but if there is anything that can be done or ordered before we go, I am quite agreeable to delay our journey. I always feel for females, I have daughters of my own. When there is anything wrong, the heaviest end of the weight is sure to fall on them."

"Ay," continued the other officer, "I have always seen it so. Why it should be, I do not know, unless it is

on eof the laws of nature, that the weakest must go to the wall."

"I don't know what is to be done," said Nanny, querulously, "I am sure. I cannot advise: there is no one to order how things should be done. I don't know what is to become of us: I wish we were all dead together!"

"Is there nobody at all you can think of, who would come and take the young lady away?"

"There is Mrs. Harrop, but she is a long way off; and Mr. Dellincourt, who was so good to us when Madam Margaret died, if he were here now he would see after things."

"Come, come, mistress, cheer up, and drink a drop of this to keep a heart in you. Where do they live?—could you not send for them?"

"They are a long way off—a very long way off," repeated Nanny, dolefully.

"Well, Mr. Marchmont will, maybe, write a letter for you; and as we shall pass through Chelmsford, I will send a decent fellow I know there, to see after the funeral. He will do it well, and honestly. Your old master will be far better under ground than above it, I can tell you, just now; so don't grieve after him."

"The master might have some curious ways, but he never was anything but a gentleman; and it is my belief, and always will be, that he was imposed upon by those who wanted their own ends with him!" said Nanny, looking wrathfully at Mr. Marchmont.

"Ah, indeed!" said the officer, pricking up his ears professionally; "and who imposed on him, do you think?"

"I don't know," said Nanny, in a sharp, suspicious tone; "and if I did, I am not going to say. But there are some who have made a tool of him, or no police-officers would have come near him to worry his last hours."

Mr. Marchmont had the grace to rouse himself from the contemplation of his own concerns, and to tell Nanny that if she would bring him the materials,

he would write to Mrs. Harrop ; and suggested that if John Scott were to take the letter, it would arrive much earlier than in the course of post, as they lived in a cross country.

"Well, he is a kind-hearted, soft sort of body, and maybe he would do it," said Nanny ; "and I would pay his journey myself."

The letter was written, and after reading it carefully through, the officer said that John Scott might ride with them as far as London.

Nanny was still hurried and bewildered, but not quite so distracted. John Scott on being appealed to, declared his readiness to go.

A few moments afterwards the noise of wheels was heard in the yard, and the medical man who had been sent for, entered the room where the officers were sitting. One of them accompanied him to the loft, to ascertain the state of the wounded man, whilst the other remained to watch.

Mr. Marchmont, who maintained a sullen silence, feeling himself, as he did, in an extremely awkward and altogether false position for a man like him ;—the consequences looked more and more doubtful and perplexing the longer he reflected upon what had happened. The curses he mentally bestowed upon the memory of Charles Herbert were numerous and heartfelt, and it was very fortunate for him that his final destination did not depend upon Mr. Marchmont's recommendation.

When the doctor and the officer returned, the former gave it as his opinion that the wounded man might be safely removed. He had been more stunned than hurt, and the plentiful hæmorrhage that had ensued had been highly beneficial.

There remained, therefore, nothing to delay their departure. Mr. Marchmont and the other prisoner were placed in the chaise ; the officers looked at their pistols before leaving the house ; one of them mounted the front seat and the other got inside ; whilst John Scott was left to drive the gig in which they had come down from London.

In this state Mr. Marchmont was driven away from the place where for so many years he had looked forward to establishing a Family that was to take root and flourish in the country, and achieve honours and wealth—the end of which, he had sometimes dreamed, might be—a peerage in the next generation.

The old Chauntry was once more left in silence, with the last of its long line of masters lying safe in death—that sanctuary whence no warrant could drag him forth, and whither no human inquisition could pursue him.

The doctor and Old Nanny returned to the bedside of Constance, who had as yet exhibited no signs of consciousness.

CHAPTER LV

WHEN Constance opened her eyes after her long fit of insensibility, Nanny and the doctor were standing beside her bed, anxiously watching her; at one time they almost feared that she would never wake more. She looked vacantly around, her memory was completely gone for the time, she did not even recognise Nanny.

"It is as well, quite as well it should be so," said the doctor, "her whole system has received a shock from which it will not readily recover, and it is as well that her recollection should be shrouded for the present. She must be kept very quiet, and nothing to startle or to recal the past must come near her. Poor young creature, she has suffered greatly. Has she no friends or relatives to take charge of her?"

"As for friends, I cannot say," grumbled old Nanny; "I will tell you when they have proved themselves. Them as should have stood by her in her trial have gone away like snow in summer. We have sent for some who have promised fair; but I tell you what, I begin to misdoubt all the world; I don't believe there is one person in it who is what they seem; I used to trust in God, and believe that he took care of folks, but seeing what I have seen, I have changed my mind. I believe in the Devil, for he seems to get it all his own way here, now-a-days."

The doctor, a formal, matter-of-fact Scotchman, without a grain of ideality, who took everything literally, was much shocked at Nanny's confession of faith.

"I hope your mistress does not share your sentiments. You are much mistaken in your estimate of things, I do assure you ; such ideas are quite wrong. However," he continued, himself turning his back upon Nanny in disgust, "you will see and give her one of these powders every three hours, and if she should become at all excited, you will administer one of these doses of musk. She will need great care and constant watching ; she must not be left alone for a moment."

Having delivered these instructions in a dry, and somewhat displeased manner, he took his departure, promising to return the next day. He turned back to say to Nanny, who had followed him down stairs :—

"Keep the funeral from her, whatever you do, and get it over quickly."

"Yes, Sir," said Nanny, curtsying. She wished to tell him she was not such a reprobate as he had judged her, but he was gone before she could begin her speech.

Madame Guyon says, in those strange records of Spiritual Experience, that only when people are stripped of everything, even of themselves, and of all the qualities that seemed most precious—when they are dead to all hope of comfort—spiritually gone to dissolution, then, and then only, are they in the condition to rise again to a higher life than the one they have lost. There is a profound truth in this mysticism, deeper than what the mere words convey. All who have experienced trials will recognise the meaning that lies in them.

Constance at this moment was touching the lowest deep of earthly desolation and bereavement ; she was stripped bare of all human comfort ; her life, seen from whatever point of view, looked a barren and lonely waste ; not a blade of hope or the faintest ray of human happiness could be discerned in any quarter ; even old Nanny wished in her heart that she might die, and be buried with her father, and so the whole family be laid at rest together.

The preparations for the funeral were hastened as much as possible ; nothing beyond what was strictly needful to lay him beneath the ground was attempted. All was ready by the time that the family vault in the old churchyard at Ingatstone could be opened to receive him.

On the second day after his miserable death, Charles Herbert, without a single friend to follow him to the grave, was carried forth from the home of his fathers, and laid beside them in their last resting-place.

A cold dull mist wrapped both earth and sky ; the clergyman shuffled hastily and lazily through the service ; which was not to be wondered at, for he was an old man, and the small, drizzling rain penetrated to the very marrow of his bones. It was as dreary an inauguration into the invisible world as could well be conceived.

The necessary forms were dispatched ; the fees paid, the few stragglers who had collected in the churchyard to see the Squire buried, dispersed, making their comments upon the change of times, and the sexton was left alone to finish his work.

For several days no tidings of any sort reached the Chantry ; it seemed altogether abandoned by the world without. Constance still remained in a placid, dreamy state of half-consciousness, which the doctor declared was partly the result of his medicines, and that she was going on well. But poor old Nanny was nearly worn out with grief and anxiety.

It was the fourth day after the funeral, and Nanny was sitting beside Constance, who had dropped asleep in trying to read her Bible, and wondering why it gave her no comfort, when the door opened softly, and John Scott, with his dress splashed up to the neck, stood beckoning to her on the threshold. She cast a hasty glance at the bed to see if Constance were awakened, and then came forward.

"Oh ! thank God, Mr. Scott, that you are come back ; I thought surely some evil had happened to you ; but how came you back alone ? Where is Mrs. Harrop ?"

John Scott explained that the roads were so bad and heavy with the rain, as to be almost impassable, and that he had ridden forward to tell her that all was well, and that Mr. and Mrs. Harrop were both on the way. He looked ill and wan with fatigue; indeed, the truth was, that he had scarcely eaten or slept since his departure.

"Oh! Mr. Scott, but you have been a good friend to us! But now sit you down and eat a mouthful, for you need it. I hope now, please God, we will wear a way through our troubles. But if that lass is ever raised up again, she will never be as she was before."

Whilst he ate, Nanny told him all that had happened in his absence, which was a great comfort to her; her enforced silence having been a greater trouble than she at all suspected, and it was such a relief to find that they were not destitute of people who cared for them: things already, to Nanny, looked brighter.

The next day brought Mr. and Mrs. Harrop, who proved themselves true friends. Mr. Harrop made at once all the arrangements for winding-up the family affairs. John Scott was left in possession of the house on behalf of Mr. Marchmont, to whom it appeared the very furniture also belonged, except a few personalities that had been Margaret's. Constance was spared all the pain of taking leave of familiar objects, or, indeed, from all knowledge of what was going on. By the end of a week everything was arranged, and the doctor declared Constance able to be removed. In spite of his cold, dry manner, he was glad that friends had at length appeared to take charge of the poor young creature.

Everything was in readiness, and Constance, wrapped in a large cloak, was lifted into the carriage, and the ill-starred Chantry was left behind to strangers.

CHAPTER LVI.

WE must now return a little to Mr. Marchmont; he has had so much influence over the individuals in this story, that some account of his subsequent life and proceedings is indispensable to its completeness.

He was brought up before the sitting magistrate at Bow-street, who was a personal acquaintance of his own, and a man who had been in the habit of dining at his house. It was with lively astonishment that the worthy magistrate saw Mr. Marchmont in such a situation, and could scarcely believe his ears when he heard what was the occasion; but as the solicitor for the prosecution applied for a remand, and in the evidence contrived to ferret out various facts connected with Mr. Marchmont's earlier career, which proved his intimate dealings on various occasions with John Maryland, the writer of the letter found in Charles Herbert's bed-room, a case of suspicion was made out against him to justify his being committed to Newgate to take his trial as accessory to the robbery. Mr. Marchmont, by the advice of his solicitor, and the dictates of his own shrewdness, "reserved his defence" until it should appear a little more clearly the shape the indictment would take, and he was committed to Newgate accordingly.

Many men who little expected it, both rogues and honest men, have at various times found themselves

within the walls of Newgate; but perhaps none were ever more astonished at such a phenomenon than Mr. Marchmont.

A man walking through the world, like that description of "intrepid virtue" which all the world has read in the "Economy of Human Life," "with his head erect above the clouds," and his feet trampling firmly upon the "tiger flinging itself across his path," and stepping suddenly there and then over the edge of a precipice which he had not perceived, would perhaps be the only individual likely to understand the full extent of Mr. Marchmont's feelings under the unexpected combination of circumstances which had sent him to Newgate!

He knew himself to be innocent of all knowledge of the transaction; but it was because he was in this instance completely the victim of a moral casualty that he felt his faith in himself shaken. In the early part of his career, when "to put money in his purse" was the chief object of his life, he had done several things which, however they might be mitigated by the phrase of "sharp practice," were far too questionable in their details to make investigation at all desirable.

He had in those days piqued himself on keeping the law at arm's length; but most men have some page in their history which, although it may throw great light upon their character, is generally suppressed as "not reading well in their biography;" so Mr. Marchmont, with all his caution, had been no exception to this rule. Years ago—so many that he chose to consider them beyond the meridian of memory—he had been engaged with John Maryland in a transaction which, although not morally worse than many others in which he had been a principal, had a more ugly and indictable shape: it concerned the affairs of a certain canal company, and had been highly profitable—indeed, it was the first important lift on his road to riches that Mr. Marchmont had met with.

He had quarrelled with John Maryland subsequently: he had endeavoured to ruin him, and had failed. He now found himself, after a lapse of years, the companion

of this man in a criminal indictment! Who could calculate the damage that a vindictive accomplice might inflict? This was the source of Mr. Marchmont's anxiety. His great hope was that John Maryland might continue to keep safe out of the reach of justice.

A trifling incident added to his uneasiness. His precious morsel of Queen Anne gold, the talisman in which he placed more faith than he would have owned to himself, slipped one day from his fingers, as he was in the act of replacing it in its receptacle, and rolled into a rat-hole before his eyes, whence no efforts of his could redeem it!

He endeavoured to persuade himself that it was not *really* of the slightest consequence, beyond the annoyance of losing a coin he had kept so long; but reason was vain—it fell on his spirits like an omen that his good fortune had deserted him, and he could not shake it off.

The clever solicitor to whom he had committed the care of his defence, was surprised to see the loss of confidence in a man like Mr. Marchmont, and began to doubt in his secret mind whether, after all, justice had not got hold of the right criminal.

The trial was postponed, in the hope of entrapping other parties connected with the robbery; and, by the curious fatality which so often brings criminals into the very den of justice, John Maryland actually ventured over to England to negotiate the reward, and was apprehended. The others who were implicated were also secured, and the trial came on.

So far as regarded Mr. Marchmont, the grand jury ignored the indictment against him, and he was immediately set at liberty; but the evil he feared overtook him, nevertheless.

His old acquaintance and deadly enemy, John Maryland, chose to conduct his own defence; not from any hope he entertained of obtaining an acquittal, but for the opportunity that it afforded him of some revenge upon Mr. Marchmont. He knew his vulnerable points, and had him into the witness-box, for no other reason than by irrelevant questions, and by abusing the latitude

accorded to a man making his own defence, he contrived not only to publish the fact of their former intercourse, but to elicit the nature of his hold over Charles Herbert; and though frequently reprimanded for consuming the time of the Court in useless digressions, before he sat down he had irremediably disfigured the fair face of Mr. Marchmont's respectability, which was all he aimed at.

It was not an entire consolation to Mr. Marchmont that in those days the reward of burglary was hanging; nor even that John Maryland and his companions were not to be defrauded of their due. He came out of court that day, feeling that everybody knew him for the hard, bad, cruel, and above all, the *low-born* man he was; and he had not the comfort of the shelter of the slightest self-deception as to the exceeding unsightly object he appeared. He saw himself, for the first time in his life, with the eyes of others. His worst enemy—the man whom he might have injured the most bitterly—would have felt amply revenged, could he have known his feelings that day!

The reflected dishonour that would fall upon his son, affected him even more than the mortification to himself. That young man, however, showed himself quite capable of taking care of himself, and certainly did not fall a victim to his filial piety.

He was shocked and annoyed beyond measure at the disclosures which had taken place. The stone had fallen plump into the very midst of the beautiful glass-house in which he dwelt before the eyes of society, viz., the position in the fashionable world into which he had climbed in right of his own merits and his wife's connections. THE CHAUNTRY, of which he had been so proud, had proved a fatal dowry!

He was, however, not entirely unequal to the emergency. He took the course of separating himself entirely from his father in popular opinion, by declaring loudly his own great scandal and distress at what had transpired; he lamented pathetically the curse entailed upon ill-gotten wealth, and made a parade of atoning for it by handsome donations to all the charities most conspicuous

to the public eye. Also, he built and endowed a row of alms-houses—which was less expensive and looked quite as well as if he had built a church; he laid a threefold varnish of respectability over his own proceedings; he signified to his father that henceforth he could hold no intercourse with him, and altogether conducted himself with the most hard-hearted skill and propriety imaginable under such difficult circumstances.

There was hope for him that after awhile (if he did not lose his property) he might again come to be looked upon with complacency, and the affair, if recollected at all, excite a certain sympathy that so respectable a man should have had such a rascal for his father.

Mr. Marchmont did not entirely disapprove of this conduct. He recognised it as the best course possible under the circumstances, and as a touch of his own genius. To do him justice, he was very glad that his son should make good his own position; but he did hope that the official act of social repudiation would be accompanied by a few filial assurances and consolations administered in secret. He was quite willing to be sacrificed ostensibly, but he desired and expected a few marks of affection from his son, as a thirsty man, lying sick and helpless, desires a draught of water; but they never came, and Mr. Marchmont went away from England a disheartened and miserable man.

He changed his name; but his evil genius seemed to have obtained the rule over him. It seemed to him as though the birds of the air must whisper of his identity; for go where he would, he was recognised, and he had become morbidly susceptible. He was not a worse man than he had always been, but his success had departed from him: he held himself aloof from everybody, and fancied that he was avoided. The sense of isolation preyed upon him, until one day he attempted to cut his throat. As if he were destined to fail now in whatever he undertook, he did not cut it effectually, he only succeeded in inflicting a ghastly wound, and was discovered and subjected to medical treatment, which restored him to life, with an ugly contraction of the muscles of the

neck, which naturally attracted the attention of all who saw him. The rumour of his attempted suicide, coupled with his solitary mode of life, added another shadow of ill omen to his presence, and people grew silent, or whispered together when he appeared.

He was an entirely miserable man, and as a last resource, took to drinking. It did not make him any happier, nor procure him any more social intercourse with his fellow-creatures. He had never possessed any genial or jovial qualities, and people naturally shrank from receiving an attempted suicide as a boon companion. He subsided into a melancholy solitary sot, and after dragging out a few miserable years, he finally died at an obscure market-town in France, of *delirium tremens*.

Phillip Marchmont and his wife attempted to establish themselves at the Chauntry, after the exposure of the trial had died out, succeeded by the over-growth of many new scandals. The feeling against them in the neighbourhood was, however, too strong for them to stem. None of the country families called upon them, or would take the slightest notice of them. The old resident gentry bitterly resented that they had ever been induced to receive the father, and it was some consolation to their ruffled feelings to visit his sins upon the son. They felt indignant, too, as at a personal injury, that such upstarts should have rooted out and dispossessed the rightful family. In their disgust to the name of Marchmont, they quite overlooked all that Charles Herbert had done to bring his misfortunes upon his own head.

After a short attempt to stand their ground, Phillip Marchmont and his wife left the country. The Chauntry lands were offered for sale, and were purchased by the proprietor of the adjacent estate as a provision for his younger son, who was going to be married.

But a melancholy tradition was associated with the house. After the discovery of the stolen treasures, and Charles Herbert's death, it was reported to be haunted: strange noises were heard there, and old Gilbert Herbert and his idiot son were said to haunt their old rooms.

The house looked more lonely and dream-like than ever. The architect who was consulted as to the possibility of giving it a more cheerful aspect, discovered that the dry rot had made extensive progress in the walls and rafters ; it was, therefore, sentenced to be pulled down.

Some vestiges of Margaret's flower-garden, the "Nun's Walk," and the avenue of lime-trees, with some ruins of the old gateway, still exist ; but the old Chantry itself has passed away, though the tradition of it is still preserved amongst the country people.

CHAPTER LVII.

CONSTANCE continued for the remainder of that year an inmate with Mrs. Harrop. That excellent woman showed herself still, as formerly, the same tender, wise, and understanding friend. Whilst with her, Constance gradually recovered her health, which had been so rudely shaken; and with her health, the tone of her spirits and character became firm and calm. The dark clouds of her past life had cleared off, leaving a clear, quiet sky behind them, and she stood on the threshold of a new life and new duties.

Her whole nature appeared to have undergone a change. Her character had become formed and firmly knit. The vague aspirations and restless dreams of youth had gone; but with them had departed also all the vain hopes which, in their brightness and disappointment, are the tax laid by Nature upon the buoyancy of youth.

She had suffered so much, that henceforth she could know no fear. She knew that nothing could be harder to endure than what had already been laid upon her, and this security is no bad exchange for the fitful happiness of passionate emotion; those who possess it, have purchased it too dearly not to know its worth. In person she had grown lovelier than ever; her large, grave, sweet eyes had a calm out-looking expression, as though

they saw better things afar off. She was like one who, after being shattered by pain and sickness, arises refreshed, and made whole out of a deep sleep.

The first instinct of her recovered strength was to take up her life, and to do the work that naturally fell to her lot. She was not objectless in life. She had, on the contrary, a very clearly-defined position, and plenty of occupation urgently awaiting her attention. Her place in Yorkshire must be her home, and her presence there was greatly needed.

When she first spoke of departure, Mrs. Harrop endeavoured to dissuade her. She had hoped that she would always remain with them, and spoke eloquently of the pleasure and comfort it would be for them all to live together. But her husband agreed with Constance, and strengthened her resolution. "If she had property, she must do her duty by it," he said; and he thought Constance one of the most enviable women in the world, to be able to manage her estate for herself, and have all her own way as though she were a man. Of course, the oftener she came to see them, and the longer she stopped with them, the better pleased he would be; but she must stand in her own place, and take up her rightful position.

There was no more to be said. In the beginning of spring, Constance prepared to depart from her kind friends. Mr. Harrop was to accompany her, and it was agreed that later in the year Mrs. Harrop should come and stop with her as long as her husband would spare her—until, indeed, he came to fetch her; and this prospect took away much of the present pain of separation. Nanny, of course, went with Constance; she had greatly recovered her health and strength during these blessed months of rest.

Left alone in her own house, Constance at first felt depressed and lonely, but she was surprised to find how much she carried her own world about with her: so different to what it had been formerly, when it was other people and the place where they dwelt that made the objects of her own life.

She soon took root in new life, it had the real secret of a home in it; she was needed there—she could not go away elsewhere without something suffering or being neglected by her absence; and that is a delicate flattery to one's self-love and sense of duty at the same time, which seldom appeals in vain. There were as many country neighbours, and as much friendly intercourse, as she desired; accustomed as she had been to the life of the Chauntry, she did not feel the desire for anything more in the shape of gaiety or society.

Her lot was certainly, to all outward appearance, calm and prosperous; those who did not know her history might have thought it almost too free from ordinary vexations and troubles to endure; but she had the drawback always exacted by Fate from all human prosperity. She had days of darkness, during which she was like the picture of Faithful, in "Pilgrim's Progress," passing in doubt, and dread, and desolate despondency, through the valley of the shadow of death, a narrow footing alone dividing her from the madness that lurked in the shadowy depths on either side.

These seasons were not of long duration, but she felt always conscious of the dark presence that might at any moment descend and overshadow her beneath its fearful wings.

To compensate, however, for these times of gloom, the intervening periods were so bright and cheerful, that whilst they lasted, it was as though she could never know sorrow more.

During the lucid intervals she enjoyed everything intensely; she seemed to enter into the very marrow of life. The knowledge that it was liable to be overshadowed, only made her time of brightness more vivid.

As she advanced in life these seasons of blackness came less frequently, and endured for a shorter time; but they never entirely ceased to visit her. They served to remind her that she had not made the sacrifice of her life needlessly. She was *at one* with herself. Once for all she had accepted the conditions of her life, and she enjoyed the peace that never fails to follow an entire

obedience to whatever has been revealed to us "as meet, right, and our bounden duty."

She looked calmly back, and could recognise that when she imagined at the time she had been making an immense sacrifice, she had, in fact, been only making a great escape; and very thankful she was, that she had not been allowed to marry such an entirely selfish man.

But when she renounced him, she renounced what she candidly believed to be all the happiness that could ever be offered to her. She loved him with all the energy of her nature, and she renounced him in obedience to a sense of a higher obligation than personal happiness. She had done so without hesitation, and without any weak endeavour to reconcile self-indulgence with self-denial. That sacrifice of self, once made, was effectual for ever. Never, through the whole course of her after-life, did any storm of human passion come near to harass her.

In early life, with an entire and perfect heart, she had renounced the gratification of an intense affection, and all idea of ever loving or being beloved again; and because that act was perfect—not made with a treacherous or divided mind—she had REST in her soul. It is the divided heart that makes the misery and restlessness of life.

A short time after Constance left Mrs. Harrop, her mother died, somewhat suddenly; but it was a deliverance that could only be welcome, for the sake of all parties.

Mrs. Harrop had two children,—a boy and a girl, and as the estate Constance enjoyed came through Mrs. Harrop's ill-starred nephew, it was only reasonable and natural that it should revert to the family. Constance adopted for her heir her young namesake and godchild, who was allowed to spend part of every year with her. There was no danger that the heart or affections of Constance should lie dormant or go to rust.

Old Nanny died at an advanced age, quite reconciled and contented with the lot that had been appointed to her darling Constance.

Mr. and Mrs. Harrop lived long and happily together. She once said to her husband,—

“If I had died of a broken heart, or gone into a convent when I was disappointed of marrying Charles Herbert, what a number of good things I should have lost! My dear, I am grown quite an old woman; but, upon my honour, I am very glad to find myself alive!”

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IF we have succeeded in articulating any principle in this book, it is to entreat our readers to have boldness to act up to the sternest requirements that duty claims as right. Although it may at the time seem to slay them, it will in the end prove life. Nothing they renounce for the sake of a higher principle, will prove to have been worth keeping.

We bid them farewell in the quaint words of Harry Martin, which he wrote by way of an epitaph of himself,—

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You'll gladly do and suffer all you must.”

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